

# UNCLE SAM'S ARMY BOYS IN ITALY



Major Andrew S. Burley



Charles Williamson









"THEY ARE CROSSING THE PIAVE. SEND SHELLS QUICK."  
[Uncle Sam's Army Boys in Italy.]

# UNCLE SAM'S ARMY BOYS IN ITALY

.. OR ..

## BOB HAMILTON UNDER FIRE IN THE PIAVE DISTRICT

*By*

**MAJOR ANDREW S. BURLEY**

Author of

UNCLE SAM'S ARMY BOYS ON THE RHINE,  
OR, BOB HAMILTON IN THE ARGONNE  
DEATH TRAP; UNCLE SAM'S ARMY  
BOYS IN KHAKI UNDER CANVAS, OR,  
BOB HAMILTON AND THE MUNITION  
PLANT PLOT; UNCLE SAM'S ARMY BOYS  
WITH OLD GLORY IN MEXICO, OR, BOB  
HAMILTON ALONG PERSHING'S TRAIL.



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## **ARMY SERIES**

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Uncle Sam's Army Boys on the Rhine,  
or, Bob Hamilton in the Argonne Death Trap.

Uncle Sam's Army Boys in Italy, or, Bob  
Hamilton in the Piave District.

Uncle Sam's Army Boys in Khaki Under  
Canvas, or, Bob Hamilton and the Munition  
Plant Plot.

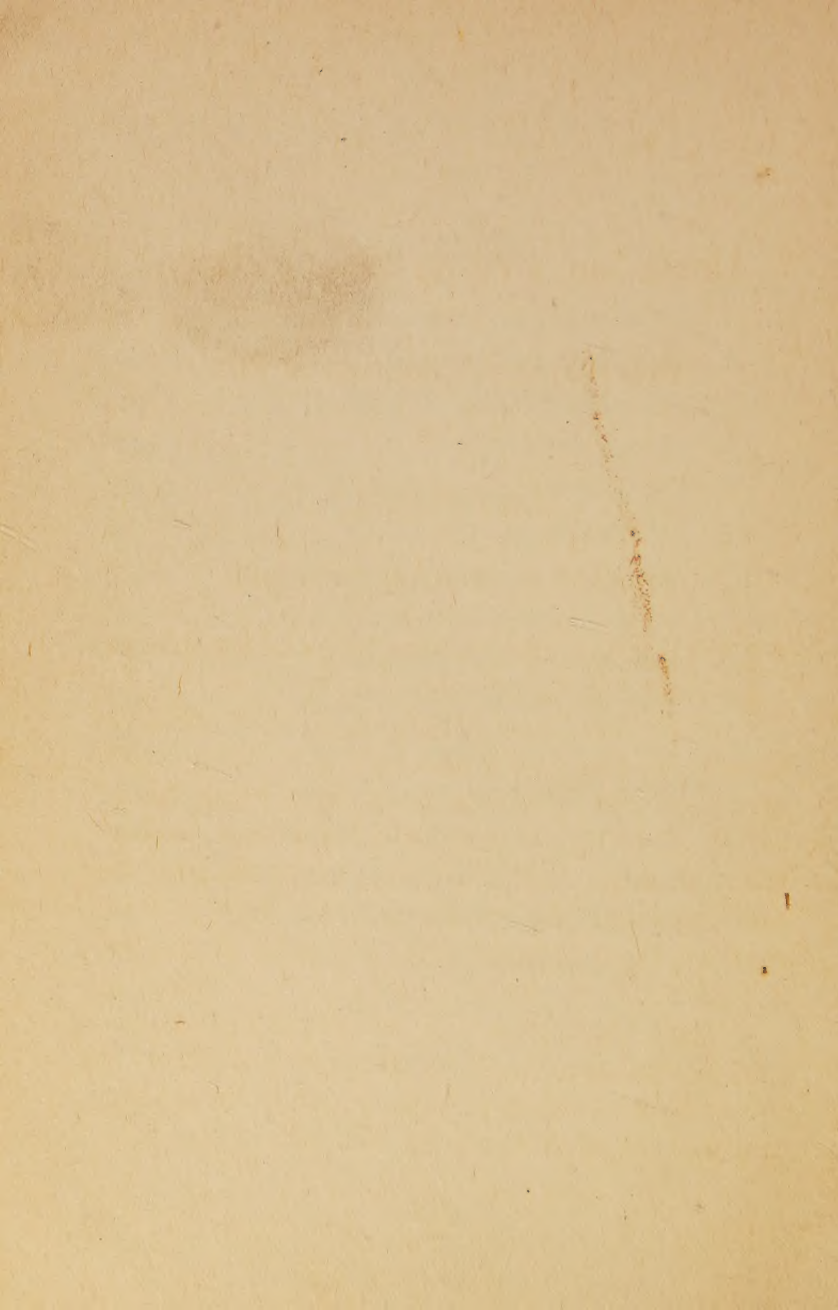
Uncle Sam's Army Boys with Old Glory  
in Mexico, or, Bob Hamilton Along Pershing's  
Trail.

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# Uncle Sam's Army Boys in Italy;

OR

## Bob Hamilton's Baptism of Fire

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### CHAPTER I.

#### ENEMIES SINCE GARIBALDI'S DAY.

**T**HE whole thing seems like a queer dream to me, Bob, and that's a fact!"

"Well, Sid, it is pretty hard to believe that we're away over here in Sunny Italy, with our dear old Virginia home city lying thousands of miles across the stormy seas, where German and Austrian subs lurk, waiting to pot unsuspecting steamers, just as we used many a time to spear green-backed frogs for a feast."

"And then, Bob, our wideawake guardian and guide here, Captain Antonio Borgia, of a noble Roman family, tells me that those dim and distant mountains we can barely see over

yonder are really a spur of the wonderful and famous Alps!"

"They are for a fact, Sid, the Alps we've read about so many times; perhaps a part of the very chain Hannibal and his ten thousand men marched up, and down again; though I've got an idea they were to the west."

"But listen, Bob, the captain says those heights are a part of the Austrian Tyrol—think of that, *enemy country!*"

"But don't forget, Sid, that the peaks we can see against the sky line yonder have already fallen before the impetuous attacks of the brave General Cadorna and his army. The Italians are fighting against terrible obstacles, but nothing seems able to hold them back. You see they have dreamed of this for years and years and years, been fed on it really since they were mere kids; because they are now fighting against their old enemies of Garibaldi's day. These lands bordering the Adriatic Sea on the east once formed a part of the proud Roman Empire, and the Italians mean to deliver their kindred, who have been groaning under an alien yoke so long. Nothing can stop them now, nothing but annihilation. We



shall soon see some of the most wonderful sights of this great World War.”

“There’s one fellow I know of, Bob, who, like as not, is wondering a lot what sort of luck we’re meeting with in our risky venture over here in Italy.”

“Of course you’re referring now to my New England cousin, Jack Warren, eh, Sid? Yes, I wrote him all about it, and sent the letter by registered mail, so that he’d be sure to get it safely. I even told him about the wonderful aerial torpedo which old Luther Fairbanks had invented, but which so far our own Government had declined to accept. You see we’ve had no need of putting money into war contracts, under the belief that Uncle Sam couldn’t possibly be dragged into this big scrap.”

“And then the old inventor opened negotiations with an European Government. The Italian Minister of the Navy, if that’s what you call him, sent word that his Commission for prosecuting the war seemed very favorably impressed with the terrible execution done by the new torpedo, but must conclude any arrangements with the inventor personally, or some accredited representative. And on our

landing in Rome we certainly met with a cordial reception—that's the right word, isn't it, Bob?"

The other young fellow laughed, and nodded. Any one could easily see that Bob was by all odds the head and shoulders of the combination of two, and that Sid stood ready, as some of their mates always said, to "sneeze whenever Bob took snuff." This was only another way of saying that he believed his chum to be the smartest and wisest and bravest chap going.

"Yes, cordial expresses the warmth of our reception all right, Sid," he hastened to say. "And then we learned that the party we wished to see chanced just now to be on an important mission to the front, where with the Minister of the Army, and the King himself, a war council was being held with the great general, Cadorna. So they gave us our choice of waiting until he returned, which might not be for weeks, or accepting the services of Major Borgia, and setting out to find our man."

"And of course, being wideawake Americans, we instantly decided that we'd much prefer going to the front, because that move would

give us a wonderful chance to see a bit of the savage fighting that's taking place in the advance on the seaport of Trieste, Austria's stronghold on the Adriatic."

"I know my cousin would be fairly wild to have such an opportunity to smell burnt powder, for he's one of a family of fighters, as his middle name, Farragut, tells plainly enough. Of course he's spent a lot of his time on the water, and when the chance comes he'll be found in the navy, just as a Lee would always be expected to join the army."

"Then why on earth didn't you ask *him* to be your companion on this trip instead of giving poor me the glorious chance?" demanded the young chap called Sid. "He'd have been a more fitting mate for you if trouble came along, Bob."

"Oh! there were several reasons," chuckled the other, with an affectionate look at his companion. "In the first place I chanced to know that Jack had certain plans of his own just about this time, concerning which he had dropped a hint in a recent letter. Then again, you see both of us are so positive in our ways that perhaps we might not agree so well as you and I seem to, because our ideas run along

the same groove. And last of all, Sid, I wanted *you!*”

“Oh! thank you ever so much, Bob!” exploded the other; “it makes me feel good to hear you say that. We have always seemed to work together like a team, even if it’s your brain that generally manages the combination. But did I understand our soldier friend to say we would stop over tonight in this place, and go on to the frontier in the morning?”

“That’s the plan, I believe,” Bob went on to explain. “We have to leave everything in his hands, for he knows all the ropes.”

“Then tonight may be the last *quiet* evening we’ll expect to pass for some time,” Sid mused, as he looked around at the quaint Italian houses.

There was the public square close by with its bubbling fountain, where women were obtaining drinking water in vases they carried on their heads without even putting up a supporting hand. Black-eyed children by scores running around, and eying the strangers curiously, besides many other peculiarly Italian sights meeting his roving gaze.

“Just as like as not,” Bob returned promptly, “for the Major says we may be close



enough to the front within twenty-four hours to catch the distant rumble of the big howitzers and guns as they reply to the Austrian batteries. You know these last have been planted high on isolated peaks that command the only road to Trieste, and Cardona's men have to get their heavy artillery up in the most wonderful way ever heard of, so as to meet the enemy on the level."

"We're going to run across some great sights, believe me!" cried Sid, enthusiastically. "I hardly know whether I'm trembling with eagerness to be a witness to a battle among the mountain passes, or because I'm a coward, and in mortal fear."

"I've seen you in some tight places, old fellow," burst out Bob, with emphasis, "but long ago I made up my mind you didn't have a drop of coward blood in your whole big body. You're a Virginian, the same as myself, and that's saying enough. Now, let's leave the hotel here, and stroll around a bit. We can easily find our way back when we feel as if it was near supper-time; though their rations over here don't strike me as worth the name, and the war bread is *terrible!*"

"Huh! I'm thinking the folks at home

won't know me when I get back, if ever I do," Sid was saying with a good-natured chuckle; "because after being only half fed for a month or two I'll grow as thin as a match."

"I think you can risk all that," his chum told him, with a humorous look at the bulk of Sid, for the other was a big chap, and one whom a little fasting would be apt to benefit, rather than hurt.

While they are roaming about, intent on seeing everything worth while in the Italian city not far distant from the scene of the fiercest fighting, it may be just as well to tell a little more in connection with the identity of Bob and Sid, also explaining more fully the reason why two young Americans should wander so far away from home when most of the world was on fire.

Both of the chums lived in the same Virginia city of Richmond, and belonged to the National Guard, for they were fine stalwart young chaps, appearing to be much older than was really the case. Besides, it was hardly to be expected that any one bearing the honored name of Robert Lee Hamilton could be kept from donning a military uniform, once he reached the required stature.

The only reason why Bob was not at West Point was because there chanced to be no vacancy to be filled by the Congressmen from Virginia; he had been anticipating being called for some little time now; and the shadow of coming events he fancied might hasten matters along, somehow or other.

Among his very many warm friends there was one in particular whose name had considerable influence with Bob, even though the possessor was a girl, with whom he had grown up from childhood. Lucille Fairbanks could be reckoned a representative Southern girl, full of the fire and enthusiasm that distinguishes the Virginia stock, but nevertheless quite patriotic.

The cruel scars of the Civil War had pretty well vanished, and her brother Claude was a lieutenant in the local company of militia. True, there were times when the old and revered Stars and Bars would be taken out and aired; and memories of that far-distant time when Lee defended the Confederate Capital to the end surged once more through the mind of the veteran, Captain Luther Fairbanks; but he believed whole-heartedly in the reunited country, and was loyal to the core.

The relic of those terrible days was Lucille's grandfather. He had latterly developed a certain war invention of which he was very proud. It was what he termed an "aerial torpedo," which could be successfully launched from a speeding aeroplane, to drop into the sea, and be sent against a war vessel at anchor.

As happened in the case of the wonderful Lewis quick-firing gun, invented by an American officer, refused by the United States Government, and accepted abroad, to become the mainstay of the Allies in the Great War, so this aerial torpedo had been turned down at Washington as something for which Uncle Sam at present had no need whatever.

Angered at such short-sighted policy the old inventor had managed to get his deadly missile into the hands of the Italian authorities; and in due time received word by wireless to come, or send a representative, to Rome. His invention had been very favorably reported upon by the commission handling the same, and terms could doubtless be arranged, as mentioned in his former communication.

Now Captain Fairbanks may have been influenced by certain hints advanced by his be-



loved granddaughter, Lucille, who knew how eagerly Bob Hamilton would avail himself of a chance to go abroad at that time; or he possibly had astonishing faith in the ability of young blood to consummate an important deal.

Be that as it may, the fact of the matter is he talked things over with Bob, and then proposed the trip, a suggestion that must have thrilled the young fellow in every fibre of his being. Of course he accepted the tempting offer, and was given the privilege of taking one companion along with him. So he immediately broached the subject to Sid, otherwise Sidney Giles Oliphant (though the owner often insisted that owing to his bulk his last name should have been "Elephant").

It took considerable diplomacy to coax the latter's parents to consent to Sid's sailing, but this was accomplished. At the very first opportunity they left on a steamer from New York City, bound through the war zone, past Gibraltar, and into the Mediterranean, headed for the Italian seaport of Naples.

By great good fortune they did not sight a single submarine on the whole trip, though the suspense at times was very great, and the ten-

sion never relaxed, once they had crossed the Atlantic.

From what the pair talked about upon being first introduced to the reader, the reason for their being at this time so far away from Rome can be understood. And with this short but necessary digression we may resume our story again.

The late Spring day was not far from its close as the two chums sauntered here and there about the Italian city, deeply interested in the many curious sights. Neither of them had ever been abroad before, and hence everything was more or less strange to their eyes. They watched soldiers drilling in various places, saw field guns being loaded on odd-looking flat-cars, evidently bound toward the front; and on every hand detected unmistakable signs that war raged in the land of Sunny Italy.

"I reckon, Bob, there's something unusual going to happen right soon," Sid was saying, a little later on, after they had turned and headed in the direction of the hotel where they had taken up their quarters. "Just see how the people are rushing about, will you, and looking terribly excited? These Italians do get roused up so easy, you know, being so im-

petuous. I wish we could understand their lingo; because I'd like to know what all the racket is about, for it keeps on getting worse and worse."

"Well, even if we do speak only a few words of Italian, Sid!" exclaimed Bob, hastily, "we ought to be able to understand their gestures. Notice how they are pointing up to the heavens, will you, and always in the direction of the sea! Listen, and you will hear one word shouted that the Major explained to us stood for aeroplane! Sid, look yonder, and see for yourself what it means!"

"Oh! my stars!" gasped the heavy-set Virginian, as he turned his back on the declining sun, nearing the western horizon, and stared toward the east, "those things away up there that I took for birds must be Austrian 'planes; and the big sausage-like object just breaking out of that low hanging cloud, why, Bob, I do declare that's what we've been told dirigible balloons look like. Would you believe it, they're actually meaning to bombard this Italian city right away; and we'll be initiated into the horrors of modern war the very first thing we know. Whew! this is rushing things, it strikes me, Bob!"

## CHAPTER II.

## THE BATTLE IN THE AIR.

**B**OB HAMILTON did not immediately answer his companion. He was staring with all his might at the moving objects seen high in the heavens. The boys had already examined certain spots where wrecked buildings marked a previous visitation from airships of the bitter enemy, so that they were thus in a frame of mind to grasp the thrilling truth.

The inhabitants of this beautiful Italian city having been through a number of experiences along this line were quick to discover the approach of a fresh covey of the air bombers, bent upon a further work of destruction. Many vanished from view, and the boys, seeing mothers dragging their innocent flocks after them, hastening no doubt to cellars and other bomb-proofs, were reminded of scenes they had often witnessed when a chicken-hawk came sailing



over a barnyard, and there was a flurry among the feathered inmates of the various pens.

"What do you suppose the object of all these air raids can be, Bob?" asked Sid, as they stood there and watched things coming to a head.

"They surely don't expect to wreck a whole city," his chum replied, "though we saw a number of magnificent churches with great gaps in their roofs and sides. It must be the German idea of frightfulness. They think to frighten the Italians into getting sick of the war, and welcome any sort of peace so as to end it."

"But that idea could never succeed!" exploded Sid. "The more the Italians suffer the wilder they're apt to get. They hate the Germans now almost as much as they've hated the Austrians, since Garibaldi's time."

"Well, you can't convince a Teuton that people are never going to be scared into giving up. They wouldn't themselves, of course, but then they never figure that other nations are just as obstinate and as brave. But perhaps we'd better change our location a bit, Sid."

"Why, do you really think we're too exposed here?" asked the other.

"It chances we're too close to that beautiful church, one of the few that so far have escaped the falling bombs," explained Bob.

"And you believe the Austrian airmen will take it for their target—is that the idea, Bob?"

"You can see that the citizens think so, because every one has cleared out from this immediate section, just as if it might be considered the most dangerous spot in the whole city. Hurry along, for they're coming up at a great rate now!"

Of course Sid was ready to do as his comrade advised; not that he felt any particular fear, because up to the present neither of them had ever heard the terrible detonation of a bomb dropped from a hovering airplane; but then it seemed the part of ordinary wisdom to take a certain amount of precaution.

They would never forget that occasion, with all manner of loud cries breaking forth around them. There were shrieks, and sobbing from frightened women and children, together with angry shouts from the dark-faced men, both soldiers and civilians.

Running swiftly along to another location, where the houses were much more humble, and therefore not likely to attract the attention of a bombing party, the boys presently came to a halt again, and turned their full attention upward.

All around them were squads of people intent on seeing what was about to happen. Curiosity had apparently gotten the better of their fears; the aerial attack possessed so many unique features that in spite of themselves they were gripped with a desire to be witnesses to the strange fight that impended.

Of course, since this city had been the object of several previous similar visitations, the military authorities must have made such provisions for defense as the ingenuity of modern man could devise. These would for the most part consist in anti-airplane guns that could be fired straight upward. They would scatter exploding shrapnel around the speeding birdmen; so that possibly one or more of the craft being struck in some vital part would fall to the earth far below.

The Zeppelin, however, presented another task, since dirigibles fly too high to be reached by ordinary anti-aircraft guns. To chase them

off it might be necessary for home defence aeroplanes to mount, and make an attack.

But as the young Americans could see, the battle was now about to break, for the leading Austrian 'plane had arrived over the outskirts of the city.

"There!" exclaimed the trembling Sid, as a loud report was heard, "they are shooting up at that first bird. See that puff of white smoke just back of the machine, will you, Bob!"

"Shrapnel!" laconically remarked the other, never for an instant taking his eyes from the startling picture overhead.

"Then it didn't faze the pilot, or the machine, either," flashed the other, "because you can see he's keeping right along. And next thing we know——"

Sid failed to finish his sentence. Indeed, there was no need of his doing so, because what happened really took the words right out of his mouth.

The very earth trembled as though with a stunning clap of thunder. Undoubtedly a bomb had been dropped, and exploded somewhere in the heart of the city lying bathed in the sunlight of that Spring afternoon.

Then other crashes came, from above and

below. They saw a myriad of splashes of white smoke here, there, and in many quarters, always in the immediate vicinity of one of the three airplanes. Far overhead sailed the giant dirigible balloon, out of reach of all this smashing of shrapnel, and only waiting for a chance to drop its load of explosives where they would do the most harm.

The roar was frightful, and the confusion even more so. Bob and Sid were really receiving their first baptism of fire, according to the most modern methods of conducting warfare.

They may have imagined they could realize what it would be like; but already found themselves willing to admit that the real thing was ten times worse than their utmost conception.

Doubtless many of the bombs went wild, and either did not explode at all or else wasted their energy upon some bare tract outside the limits of the town. This was owing to faulty aiming on the part of the pilots, or the fact that they maintained such a great height in order to run less risk.

Suddenly in the midst of all this roaring confusion Sid clutched the arm of his chum in a fierce grip.

“Oh! they got one, just as sure as you live,



Bob!" he fairly shrieked, as with his other trembling hand he pointed upwards.

Really there was no need of his saying anything, because Bob had made the same thrilling discovery at the identical time. Yes, one of the invading airplanes was acting queerly, whirling in quick spirals as the pilot vainly tried to regain his control of the stricken machine.

No one would ever know just what happened, or whether it was the pilot himself who had received a mortal blow from some jagged piece of metal thrown out when the shrapnel exploded. Vainly did the hostile 'plane swing around two, three times, for it suddenly began to fall, turning over and over.

The two chums stared as they saw a sprawling figure shooting toward the earth half a mile below, growing larger the faster he came down from his lofty height. Of course, it was all over with that unlucky birdman, indeed, he would never know what struck him, after once starting to fall.

There was a rush of people toward the spot where the enemy seemed destined to drop. Perhaps the enraged citizens, men, women and children, were so furious over the fresh as-

sault on their beautiful churches that could never be replaced that they yearned to feast their eyes on one hostile bomb-thrower lying in an unrecognizable mass.

“Look, Bob, the Italians are going up after that Zeppelin, seems like!” cried Sid, just then.

Several airplanes of a different make from the Austrian machines could be seen ascending in rapid spirals, boring their way upward with persistence. It was as though those who manipulated the levers meant to soon practically get on a level with the dirigible that hovered so high above the devoted city, when they could give battle, and either chase the huge balloon away or cause it to fall a wreck.

The picture grew even more exciting now, with a defiant home flotilla of armed airplanes accepting the challenge thrown down by the invading squadron of enemy craft.

“We didn’t count on being treated to such a spectacle as this, and so soon, too, after landing on Italian soil, eh, Bob?”

Sid said this even while the guns continued to roar all around them; the bombs to explode with sickening concussions of the air; and the more distant bursting of the shrapnel telling

that the fight still continued as fiercely as ever.

"It's only a foretaste of what's coming to us, I reckon," was the only remark the other permitted himself to make, such was his interest in the unfolding of the up-to-date picture before him.

They realized that a wonderful streak of good fortune allowed them to gaze upon a scene the like of which had been witnessed by few American eyes thus far. But that was no time for doing any thinking, or even allowing themselves to feel a sense of gratitude on account of their great luck. Something thrilling was taking place every second. Bob felt just as he could remember at a certain time when enjoying a three-ringed circus, and being hard pushed to try and watch all that was taking place simultaneously in the trio of sawdust arenas.

Higher mounted the venturesome Italian 'planes. Those who controlled the levers knew that many thousands of friendly eyes were anxiously watching their every movement, and this of itself would be apt to spur them on to doing unusual things, even if the desire for revenge were not incentive enough.

Now they had risen to a level with the re-

maining two Austrian 'planes, already in full flight, as though not willing to meet their fresh rivals in a battle for air supremacy.

"Why, they're actually running away, don't you see?" called out Sid, with perhaps a vein of supreme contempt in his voice, for he hated a coward, and such he was fain to term the discreet invaders.

"Oh! they've exhausted all their stock of bombs, most likely," Bob told him, "and as the Italians are four to one they think it wise to clear out while the going is good."

"But why don't our fellows strike after them then?" demanded the other. "They are on a level with the pair, I should think; but see how they just keep on boring upward all the time. Can you explain that, Bob?"

"I've an idea they mean to get after the big fellow higher up," Bob told him.

"The dirigible, you mean. Now, that would explain their queer actions, wouldn't it, Bob? The 'planes can be left to the guns down here. Oh! I saw something leave the Zeppelin just then, sure I did! It must be they've heaved their explosives over in a heap. Hold your breath, Bob, because it'll be an awful wrench."

Sid even stood on his tiptoes, as he had seen fellows do when a large cannon was about to be fired on the Glorious Fourth. At least he did not have long to wait, for the earth under their feet shook in a sickening way, and at the same time their ears were fairly racked with the roar of a frightful concussion.

Sid almost fell over, and really had to throw out an arm so as to get a clutch upon a neighboring building.

The billowy sound died away, but a pall of black smoke rising from some distance announced the quarter where the explosion had occurred.

"Anyway I believe they missed their mark, and that it fell outside the city limits, which would be a good thing!" announced Sid, on recovering his footing.

"That was a most horrible crash," Bob found time to admit, "but according to my notion it won't hold a candle to what's going to happen when the Fairbanks aerial torpedo starts to get in its destructive work. From what I've heard the inventor say, there never has been anything like it before. He believes it represents the last word in modern warfare, and that after it begins its work of destruction



the Teutons will be only too glad to throw up their hands, and admit there are some other folks on this old planet who can do things worth while."

"Bob, they're skedaddling to beat the band!" cried Sid, exultantly. "Seems as if they don't just fancy staying around, and trying conclusions with a pack of the little stinging hornets. Yes, it's good-bye to the big sausage balloon, and back to its shed across the Adriatic, to wait for another chance to make the voyage. See how the Italian pilots are humming along after it, will you? And listen to the bravos all around us. These excitable people can stand the hard knocks all right so long as they feel that their forces are chasing the enemy off in the end."

"I hope they get a show at the big beast," Bob ventured, "though I hardly think it will happen."

"But surely an aeroplane can speed just as fast as a Zeppelin, can't it?" demanded Sid, looking disappointed on hearing what the other said.

"Yes, but the dirigible can mount even higher than the smaller craft, and lose itself among the clouds, you see, Sid. Besides, don't

forget that the day is done, the sun about to set, and soon darkness will be around us; so away up yonder even such a bulky object as a dirigible could be very easily lost sight of in the gathering shadows of night."

"I wonder what the damage will amount to?" mused Sid, with a streak of genuine boyish curiosity in his manner.

"Plenty of it, I reckon, Sid, and perhaps another fine old historical church sent to the scrap-heap. If this war keeps on a few years longer Europe will be hardly worth coming across the Atlantic to see, because most of the things worth while will have been smashed. Belgium and Northern France have already felt the iron heel of the Teuton invader, and whole cities been laid in ruins. They say the Teuton is like the ancient Hun, wishing to destroy all that is beautiful, so as to fill his enemies with fear of him. But it wasn't of churches, public buildings and monuments I was thinking about so much as human beings."

"That's so, Bob, there must have been some loss of life, after all that bursting of bombs. Perhaps we might be useful in a way. We've learned something about first aid to the injured when we were Boy Scouts over at home in

Richmond. And I imagine these impulsive, warm-hearted people here would welcome any assistance we might be able to render."

"Then suppose we start out and find where the worst damage was done," suggested Bob, with one last glance aloft at the small spots seen against the heavens that told of the fleeing Zeppelin and its persistent pursuers.

## CHAPTER III.

## UNCLE SAM'S BOYS BECOME POPULAR.

HOW will we know where the damaged part of the city lies?" asked Sid, accustomed to relying mainly upon the sagacity of his wideawake chum when questions of policy arose.

"By following the crowd," the other promptly told him; and apparently Sid realized how much wisdom there was in this plan of action, because he did not offer the least objection.

Indeed, it would have been silly to attempt starting in any other direction, because in so doing they would meet with a constant swarm of people hurrying the other way. These were all chattering volubly in the Italian language, and evidently consumed with that peculiar fascination that prompts most folks to push forward and shiver as they see the victim of a street car accident, or a runaway.

It was not long before they passed the mag-

nificent edifice beside which they had been standing at the time the first alarm was given. A dwelling house adjacent lay in a heap of crumbled ruins, the walls having been blown out, so that the whole interior lay exposed to view. This made a most remarkable spectacle, at least to the eyes of Bob and Sid, unaccustomed to such things. The ancient church with its priceless contents did not seem to have been touched, showing that the aim of the bomb thrower had been faulty.

Further on they discovered that the crowd swarmed about a heap of rubbish lying in the narrow street. Another building, this time what may have been an Italian palace, had been wrecked. The people were apparently searching the ruins, either for objects of value, or else in expectation of coming across the bodies of those former inmates who had been unfortunate enough to be caught like rats in a trap when the catastrophe occurred.

When Sid caught the word "palacio" he sniffed scornfully.

"All the so-called palaces we've seen over here, Bob, look like gloomy old prisons. Why, they're not in the same class with our modern homes over in New York or Washington.



But I do believe they've found some one under the rubbish heap, judging by the way they act."

"And there are others hurt further along, because that must have been a doctor we saw wave his hand toward some of the crowd. Like as not every surgeon in town will have his hands full right now attending to the injured. Most of them must be working with the Red Cross units at the front, anyway, so they'll be short-handed around here. Come, let's push ahead and see if we can be of any help!"

Sid was only too ready to do as his comrade suggested. His heart was as tender as his body was big; and ready to respond to any pitiful appeal, no matter what the circumstances might be.

They found it no easy matter to press through that dense throng. Most of the crowd doubtless shoved and pushed in order to get closer only through a sense of curiosity, though others may have feared that loved ones lay among the injured, simply because they had become separated from them in the vast confusion.

Presently the Americans managed to get close enough to see what it was all about. Three

persons lay propped against a heap of stones, mortar and earth, possibly fragments of the once proud home of some Doge of long ago. They were white of face, and streaks of red told that their wounds were of no trifling nature.

Several women and men were attempting to render them aid, but it was easy to see from their clumsy manner that none of them were doctors, or in fact knew the first thing about stanching a bleeding wound.

Bob did not hesitate. He felt that what little they could do in such an emergency was far better than nothing. One of the victims of the explosion might bleed to death if left unattended until some physician could be found, and hurried to the spot.

Fortunately Bob knew how to pronounce the Italian word for "doctor" so that he could be understood. They fell back at hearing it, which was just what he most desired just then.

"Here, this one seems hurt the worst of the lot, Sid, so let's get busy," was the energetic fashion in which Bob assumed his new duties.

The hovering crowd watched their every movement eagerly. It seemed as though two

hundred pairs of black eyes might be focussed on the spot just then, and the owners marveling that such young fellows could claim the name of doctor. Already doubtless it was being whispered about that they were "Americans," for tens of thousands of Italian laborers must have returned from across the ocean, to take their places in the ranks of the King's army, and go forth to combat with the hated Austrian. These men would have heard the language of the newcomers, and recognized it as familiar.

They had absolutely nothing to work with, but had been educated in a school that teaches the young aspirant how to apply a makeshift in case of necessity. So Bob having first ascertained just how the man lying there was wounded, bade his chum tear the offending garments aside; and then holding up his own pocket handkerchief, made motions to the crowd that he wanted something in the nature of cloth with which to make bandages.

They readily grasped his meaning, and several women hastened to supply what he so urgently needed; aprons, and other garments, as well, were ruthlessly sacrificed in the spirit of generosity that pervaded the sympathetic

crowd, so that Bob speedily found himself compelled to hold up his hands to signify that he had abundance now.

Then he set to work making a rude tourniquet which, by careful twisting, could be depended on to press so tightly on the severed artery that the flow of blood would be stopped.

He could almost feel the eyes of the scores of onlookers fastened eagerly on him, and when finally the simple little surgical operation was completed there arose murmurs of admiration, mingled with a few of the customary bravos.

Next the amateur surgeons turned their attention to the other sufferers. These were two children, evidently belonging to the lower classes, judging from their humble attire. They must have chanced to be hurrying past when the exploding bomb hurled the wall of the palace into the narrow street, and buried them under the debris.

Tenderly and faithfully did Bob and Sid bind up their hurts. Neither had received a serious wound, Bob learned, after making a superficial examination. When from his manner and gestures the crowd learned this pleasing fact there was another chorus of appreci-

ative exclamations, accompanied by smiles and nods.

Apparently Bob and Sid were making themselves solid with those sorely-tried citizens of this famous city, one of the closest to the battle lines in all Italy; if they had cared to linger there they might have been publicly thanked, and possibly fêted on account of their charitable work.

Not satisfied with having done what they could at this point, as soon as everything had been looked after they started along the street, anxious to find another chance to lend a helping hand to those in dire distress. The mob surged after them, but showing the utmost respect toward the wonderful young surgeons from far away America.

They soon came to another heap of wreckage, and found that there were also injured persons close by. A native doctor, however, was in attendance, doing all that was necessary; so Bob dragged his chum after him.

"We'll move along further and see what we can find," he observed; "because it'd hardly be right for us to meddle with the work of a regular physician. He might get huffy at seeing how clumsy we were, I'm afraid."



“Well, I don’t look at it that way, if you do, Bob,” declared the other, decidedly. “You did that job first-class, if I do say it, and a doctor would only throw you bouquets on account of it, if he was honest. But I think I can see yet another bunch of ruins down this street here. They’ve hit the old town a hard crack this time, for sure; it’s been peppered all over with those pesky bombs. Say, how our boys in gray who fought with Lee and Jackson would stare if they could have been alongside us just a bit ago, and seen what modern warfare was like, with bombs dropping from the skies like thunderbolts forged by immortal Jove.”

They presently found their hands full again, for several persons had been more or less injured by the explosion of the bomb. It had played havoc with the bed of the street itself, as well as the surrounding houses, the walls of which were full of holes where broken pieces of metal had lodged, or torn a way through.

So the work went on. The young Good Samaritans were so deeply interested in relieving distress that they paid scant attention to the passing of time, and half an hour must have

slipped by, when their military escort found them in the centre of an admiring throng, every man, woman and child of which was trying to shake hands with the gallant "American doctors."

They managed to break away from the crowd with more or less difficulty, when Captain Antonio thrust an arm through the crook of an elbow belonging to Bob and Sid, and bore them off amidst many plaudits and much vociferous waving of hats and scarfs.

"You seem to be a pretty popular chap tonight," chuckled Sid, to his chum, as they threaded the crowded streets in the gloaming, heading in the direction of their hotel. "If it happened that there was an election tomorrow, providing they have such things over here in Sunny Italy, I reckon, Bob, you could be easily chosen mayor of the ancient old burgh. Even our friend here, the Captain, is smiling as if he was proud to be in your company."

The officer spoke excellent English, which was of course one reason why he had been selected to act as their guide and counsellor while on their way to the front in order to meet the Italian Minister of the Navy.

"If you keep on making friends among

my people as you have done this evening, signors, you are bound to become very popular indeed," he told them. "You know that there is a strong bond between our two countries. We Italians believe America to be the finest land on the face of the earth, barring only one, which of course is our own Italy. It has been for countless thousands the land of good fortune, whence they have gone, and in a few years accumulated a little fortune, enough to keep them in comfort the rest of their days. So the story has spread, and it would be difficult to find a single Italian of mature age who does not know and admire your beautiful country. But here is our hotel, and if you are as hungry as myself you will hope we are not too late for supper."

By the time the meal was finished, and they came outdoors again it seemed as if all the noise had subsided. The air raid had been the most severe thus far encountered by the devoted citizens, and doubtless must cause them more or less uneasiness, looking to a further repetition at some future date. But perhaps it would also act as a spur to hasten a better means for defence than any thus far attempted.

The stars shone overhead, but they scanned

the clear heavens in vain for any sign of hostile air-craft. Doubtless the two remaining 'planes, together with the dirigible, if all of them had successfully eluded the pursuing detachment, had by now crossed the sea to their base on the eastern shore. Wonderful stories were likely to be circulated on the morrow concerning the enormous amount of military damage the raid had accomplished, when in truth the result of all the bombing had been a dozen houses laid in ruins, several innocent persons, mostly women and children, killed and wounded, and nothing else.

During the night whenever Sid chanced to awaken, he found himself listening, as if in expectation of hearing a fresh outbreak of explosions. Perhaps his dreams had been filled with aerial attacks on a large scale, so that the exciting incidents were fresh in his mind when he roused from his sleep.

But nothing happened to mar the night. The loss of one machine, as well as the intrepid manner in which those Italian airmen had promptly accepted their dare, and given them battle, would perhaps cause the Austrians to think twice before venturing a further attack on the devoted city of the Adriatic.

Morning came, and after a breakfast that could hardly be called bounteous, looked at from an American standpoint, they prepared to embark on a train that would leave for the border along about eight o'clock.

Of course it would be crowded with troops going forward, because no train save one carrying soldiers ever started north in these days of stress, just as none arrived from that region that did not bring fresh numbers of wounded in uniform.

It was a bustling picture there at the station, and both Bob and his chum took considerable enjoyment in watching all that went on. They would never have been allowed aboard that military train only for the passport carried by Captain Antonio, which bore a name that would take the proud possessors anywhere they felt inclined to go.

"Some of the people seem to recognize you, young signors," remarked their guide, looking pleased. "See, they wave their hands to you, and kiss the tips of their fingers. It is the Italian way of saying 'how-do-you-do, signors; we wish you every good fortune in your enterprise, whatever your visit to poor troubled Italy may be at this war-time.' If you would



quite win their hearts return the salute in the same fashion. Ah! see how their faces light up, and they exchange pleased nods and smiles."

When Bob and Sid started to get aboard later on loud cries were heard, and above other words they caught the magic one of "Americano," showing that the cheering was really intended for them.

"That pays over and over again for what little we were able to do last night to help out!" Sid declared.

He gave a last wave of his hand to the crowd before entering the dingy Continental carriage, already pretty well crowded with officers, some of whom wore the long plumes on their hats that distinguished Italian crack Bersagliere fighters.

Presently they were passing to the north, the city left far behind them. And it was more or less thrilling to know that every mile they covered took them just that much closer to the scene where the two great armies were engaged in a death grapple, amidst the towering peaks of the mountains that formed the greater part of the country around Trieste, the main goal of the Italian hopes.

All day long they moved onward, sometimes with considerable speed, but again more tediously, on account of a single track, and more or less congestion of traffic, because of such a vast amount of munitions and reinforcements going forward to the fighting line.

And when the day drew near its close they learned that the border had been crossed, so that in truth they were right then on Austrian territory!

## CHAPTER IV.

## AT THE FRONT.

WE must stop here for the night, the Captain has just informed me, Sid," observed Bob Hamilton, about the time the shadows of evening were gathering.

Sid heaved a sigh of relief at hearing this. He had been staring rather apprehensively from the window of the railway carriage for some little time.

"Honest truth, now, old fellow, I'm not very sorry to hear that," he confessed in his customary frank fashion. "Some of those chasms out there look pretty fierce to me, and I'd hate to have this old train tumble over the edge when we're passing along so close. It's bad enough in the daytime, when the driver in the engine cab can see what he's up against, but excuse me from passing along this way, once it gets real dark. But why the halt, Bob? I don't fancy they're doing it just to oblige *me*."

“Oh! this road was destroyed by the Austrians when they withdrew deeper in among the mountains,” explained Bob, “and has been hurriedly restored by the Italian engineer corps; but it needs more attention. So traffic is being forbidden from night-fall to dawn. We’ll be crawling forward again by sun-up, I reckon.”

“And surely some time tomorrow we ought to be getting where they’re doing all this fierce scrapping. Seven times now we’ve seen trains filled with dead and wounded soldiers waiting on side tracks for us to pass. Oh! it must be just dreadful, the way human lives are being sacrificed by uncounted thousands, and all to make a Roman, or rather in this case, a Teuton holiday.”

“Well, the Kaiser and his people are paying dearly on account of their ambition to build up a Middle Europe that could defy the world, and really rule the whole earth with a rod of iron,” said Bob, as the train with sundry shakings came to a standstill.

Orders must have been given for the soldiers to leave their crowded quarters aboard the cars, some of them open gondolas, others make-shift carriages that had long seen their

best days. They were only too well pleased to obey, for they must be feeling dreadfully cramped. Besides, it was getting quite cool riding in the night air, and they yearned for the cheery warmth of the camp-fires, as well as some means for breaking their long fast.

It was found that a tent had been set aside for Captain Antonio and the two Americans, such was the wonderful influence of the paper the military guide carried from Headquarters in Rome. Besides this they were requested to join some jolly officers who had adjoining tents, and meant to get together in a regular mess for the evening meal.

The scene was so picturesque that Sid stood outside the tent for a long time and continued to feast his eyes upon it. There were the sparkling camp-fires, the bustling men in uniform, the jabber of merry voices, and then the appetizing odors of cooking supper that presently began to fill the whole vicinity, and arouse dormant appetites. All these and more united to enchain him there, watching, and storing the picture away in his memory, to be recalled later on when amidst other scenes.

Looking up Sid could see the gloomy outlines of the high mountain peaks standing like



grim sentries against the star-gemmed heavens. He knew that in all probability many of these were still covered with snow, which was why the night air felt so chilly, and caused the fires to be doubly appreciated.

Then came the summons to supper. It was a merry party of young officers who gathered around to do justice to the humble but bounteous spread. The strangers enjoyed the experience greatly. They found themselves partaking of dishes with which they had not thus far become familiar; but then that mountain appetite seasoned every viand, and they passed up their platters for several generous helpings.

Captain Antonio acted as interpreter. Many questions were asked concerning the great republic whence they came. In particular these Italians seemed most anxious to know whether Uncle Sam really expected to get into the war. They also asked why a free country like the United States could hold out so long, when liberty was being throttled, small nations invaded and subdued ruthlessly, and all international laws stamped underfoot.

The horror of the *Lusitania* sinking had gone through the whole of Italy, and it was hard for these fiery young officers to under-

stand how a proud and powerful nation like America could submit to such a terrible insult. Bob answered as best he could, although it has taxed much older and smarter persons than he claimed to be to make an intelligent reply to this same question.

Even the overhanging shadows of battle could not subdue the exuberant spirits of those young and ambitious officers. They seemed overjoyed at the prospect of being soon on the firing line. The fact that many of them would possibly never again see those dear ones they had parted from so recently did not seem to dampen their ardor a particle. Such is the enthusiasm of youth; and it is partly on this account that those just budding into manhood are chosen in the first draft for fresh battalions of troops.

That was another night not soon to be forgotten by Bob and Sid, entirely different from the one preceding it.

Once during a brief lull in the singing and chatting one of the officers held up his hand to draw attention.

“Do you not hear a peculiar far-away faint grumble in the air?” Captain Antonio asked, turning to his two eager charges.

"Now that you mention it I certainly do, Captain," admitted Sid.

"It is the great guns!" came the significant communication that caused the pulses of the young chaps to thrill in a peculiar way. "They are leveling the trenches of the enemy again. Perhaps, who knows, we may arrive in time tomorrow to see something worth while—a charge of our first line troops up some cliff, to take a lofty peak where an enemy battery is stationed. Nothing is too venturesome for our valiant Bersaglieri to attempt. Their record has been a proud one, and all Italy sounds with their praises."

After that it was only natural that both of the young fellows should keep listening. When the night wind proved favorable they could hear from time to time the queer rumble, as those monster howitzers hammered away at the rock-ribbed trenches occupied by the crafty Austrians. These were located at certain strategic points along the main road leading to Trieste on the Adriatic, the one city the invaders were mad to capture.

In imagination they could see the inspiring spectacle which inside of twenty-four hours was likely to become a reality with them. They

pictured thousands of soldiers crouched behind such shelter as they could find, awaiting the order to go wildly forward over every obstacle until they found themselves at hand-grips with the foe. The big guns would be bellowing like mad here, there and everywhere, being answered in kind by Austrian mortars, some of the mammoth kind which their works are famous for turning out.

By now the two chums were becoming accustomed to sleeping under strange conditions. Accordingly later on they sank to rest, lulled by the faint pounding of that terrible anvil in the distance.

This land on which they had now set foot was the one-time territory belonging to the Romans in days of old. It had been forcibly taken by Austria, and there were some hundreds of thousands of Italians living along the strip close to the sea. These had groaned under hard taskmasters for so long that their redemption had been the one great dream with the people of Italy for many years. Now that at last the hand had been put to the plow there could be no turning back until that sacred object had been finally attained.

Sid really knew next to nothing from the

time he lay down until he heard a trumpet sound the reveille in the early morning. He crawled forth to find the military camp astir, with breakfast preparing. This would mean an early start onward to where glory was beckoning these gallant young men, glory amidst death's harvest.

The surroundings of the camp looked more sublime than ever as seen in the soft glow of the sunrise through a gap toward the east. Sid fairly held his breath with awe as he feasted his eyes on the sublime picture.

Then came the embarkment, and the start of the train. Their progress was very slow for various reasons. In the first place there were places where it seemed dangerous to cross some chasm that had been hastily spanned with a new bridge or trestle, as the Austrians had destroyed everything that could be of service to the invaders. Then there were other trains coming from the front, which could only be passed by some really clever handling. These, as could be seen, were filled with wounded.

Despite their desperate conditions many of these gallant fellows would struggle to a sitting position so as to wave their hands eagerly at those aboard the train loaded with fresh



recruits. From their manner it might easily be believed they actually envied the newcomers the chance to start into the fight, such is the dare-devil nature of the soldier.

By noon they had made considerable progress, despite the many vexatious delays. Now they could hear the pounding of those great guns most decidedly. Indeed, when walking up and down during some stoppage, in order, as Sid expressed it, to "get the kinks out of their legs," they could easily feel the solid rock quivering under their feet because of the tremendous throbbing of the howitzers.

Sid became very anxious to know what the prospects were with regard to their arriving on the ground. He hoped it would be in time to witness one of those remarkable onsets which have made the Italian soldiers the wonder of the world as mountain fighters.

"Do you think we'll get within seeing distance of the front before it's all over with, Bob?" he asked.

At a time they were remaining stationary for some ten minutes, so as to let a long train filled with injured men creep past in a tortuous fashion, all on account of a weak trestle at the place of meeting.

“The Captain seems to expect that we will,” he was assured. “He says that as long as all that bombardment keeps up the order for the assault has not as yet been given. They want to be sure the enemy trenches have been ground to atoms, so that no machine guns can possibly rake the column as it starts out. Armed with such a weapon, you know, one man counts for fifty or a hundred, as he can cut them down just as ripe grain falls before the mowing machine. Yes, we stand a chance to see the last act in the drama of the day.”

“I suppose they have to do their stunt of climbing the heights in the broad daylight, as a regular thing, eh, Bob?”

“I don’t know that it always happens that way, but it strikes me it would in the majority of cases. To do such risky climbing it must be necessary to have light to see by; for a single slip would send a fellow plunging to his death, perhaps even carrying half a dozen of his comrades along with him.”

Sid sat there very quiet for some time after that; even when the train finally started again, and they were making pretty fair speed he continued to be absorbed in deep thought. The fact was, Sid found himself more and more

surprised at the amazing things that were being done as everyday practices in this latest and greatest of world wars. Hazardous feats that fifty years ago would have given the Victoria Cross to the participant were now being carried out as though a part of the ordinary daily programme. And he began to believe that the further he and his chum delved into this thrilling game the greater would be the marvels they were going to run across.

But he was more than glad he had come. In spite of all the horrors, the perils that lay on every side, and the deprivations they might have to suffer while in this land of battle, Sid felt that he would be more than doubly repaid for everything. And if they discovered other occasions when they could lend a helping hand to those unfortunates who were in dire need of assistance, how willingly would they accept of the chance.

Two o'clock found them further on their way. Louder grew the thunder of the guns that answered back the Austrian challenge, two shots for one. The noise had become one continuous jumble of dreadful sounds, so that it was not possible to distinguish the explosion

of a monster shell from the discharge of the piece of ordnance itself.

"Getting some noisy, seems to me," Sid volunteered. "And I'm sure I saw the gun that made the last blast. It was over yonder on that high peak, so that the smoke billowed out this way."

"Which would mean it must have been an Austrian gun," Bob told him, which information seemed to both surprise and thrill the other, judging from the look upon his face, and the eager way in which he cried out:

"Then we're getting close up to the firing-line, it seems, if we can watch the enemy blazing away at our friends the Italians. I suppose now if those chaps could glimpse this train they'd be apt to send a ticket this way, and try to knock us all out in a jiffy. But they're stopping again, Bob. Do you have any idea what's up now?"

After listening to some talking that was going on outside Captain Antonio turned to his young charges to say:

"We go no farther than this point. It would be too risky, as you Americans say, for you see just beyond here the railroad into Goritz runs over an open stretch, and is in full

view of the elevated posts of the enemy. Besides," he added with a queer grimace, and a shrug of his shoulders, "to tell you the truth there is no railway beyond that bend in the road. It has been annihilated with Austrian shells exploding, and mines planted under the roadbed, to be exploded from a distance when our men should have swarmed along the line."

"Of course that settles it then," laughed Bob, "and we'll have to continue our forward movement by way of Shank's mare, meaning our own good pins. And from the looks of the rocky country all around here, I reckon, friend Sid, that we're going to have a mighty fine chance to prove what sort of mountain climbing goats we can be in an emergency."

"Oh! I'm on to any sort of game," the other told him. "Besides, I always did like hill climbing from the time I was knee high to a duck."

Captain Antonio heard this and smiled broadly. Perhaps he was making up his mind that the speaker would soon have about all the pleasurable excitement along those particular lines he wanted. You see, Captain Antonio had been out with the army in the trenches for many moons, and knew from bitter experience



what was to be expected, even when only trying to find an elevated post from which to view some stirring drama of the Julian Alps.

Presently all of those aboard the train had disembarked, and the soldiers fell in line ready to proceed to their appointed station.

**CHAPTER V.****WAITING FOR THE SIGNAL.**

**T**HE sun was still high in the heavens. There remained abundance of time for the "great push," as Sid persisted in calling the attack which he knew must be impending.

"If the young signors will kindly accompany me," Captain Antonio was saying, with one of his polite bows, and an engaging smile, "we can now proceed to a certain observation point that has been pointed out to me by the colonel commanding this particular front."

"Please lead the way, Captain," Sid hastened to say, with an intake of breath that betrayed his eagerness.

Accordingly they started to make a little detour. This was rendered necessary because of the fact of the country being rocky and precipitous. It was also on account of the enemy being constantly on the alert with his skillful

sharpshooters to pick off any one who rashly exposed himself.

The boys managed to do the climbing with more or less success, though several times Sid shuddered when he found himself staring down into some chasm that yawned (he could think of no other word to describe it) at his feet.

In due time then, they found themselves safely lodged in the nook which was to become their post of observation. A wonderful view could be had of the sheer height destined to be made the object of attack by the dauntless Italian Alpine climbers.

“Look all you wish,” advised their guide and guardian, “but be careful how you make any quick movement. Many glasses are leveled in this quarter, there is little doubt. You see, the King, together with General Cadorna, and the two Heads of the Army and Navy Departments of the Government are in hiding somewhere near by, and it might be that the enemy suspects that very fact.”

“We promise to be very quiet, Captain,” said Sid, solemnly. “While we are protected somewhat by this rocky roof overhead, at the same time it might not stand off one of those

whoppers of shells from an Austrian howitzer."

The view was inspiring. They could plainly see the figures of the Austrian gun-crews appearing and vanishing like phantoms as they served their monster weapons far up along the crest of the peak.

Volumes of smoke would roll forth accompanying each deafening crash. Then the busy Italian guns, many of them of British make, would roll back a double reply, while smaller arms rattled almost continuously.

"Why!" exclaimed the wondering Sid, when he found a chance to speak between the salvos of artillery, "you'd think they'd use up all the ammunition the whole world could manufacture."

The suave Italian officer shrugged his shoulders as he went on to say:

"It certainly keeps us busy hauling up fresh supplies. Between troop trains there are as many as three that are given up entirely to munitions. You know it takes a very great amount of powder and ball to account for every Austrian killed—I forget the exact quantity, but it is very heavy."

"But you surely mean to get Trieste in the end, don't you, Captain?" Sid asked.

"We have decided, and no matter how long this war lasts it shall be done. Long have we waited for this day, to strike the blow; and now that it is at hand we will see it through, cost what it may."

Sid looked out again.

"But if your people mean to climb to the top of that terrible peak, and clear it of the enemy, they'd better be making a move. Why, I declare I can't see the first sign of the Italian soldiers who expect to do the climbing."

"Nevertheless, young signor, they are waiting, thousands of them, waiting for the signal to sound. Behind rocks they lie, taking it easy, and utterly out of sight from here, as well as from above yonder; because the air may be filled with bursting shrapnel, and the fragments come straight down at times. You can not see them, but depend upon it they are ready."

"And," continued the other, still lost in wonder and awe, "do you mean to tell me human beings can climb up the sheer face of that rise, where sometimes for a hundred feet it is nothing less than a smooth cliff?"



“You shall see presently,” came the steady reply. “There is hardly a height known that those mountain men cannot scale. They have made it the one feature of all their military drill. I myself have seen your firemen in New York mount ladders, hang from one another’s feet, and do marvelous what you call ‘stunts.’ Ah! it will make your blood rush madly through your veins, my young friends, when you watch them. The chamois it has nothing on those practiced climbers; they can pass over a wall forty feet high while you wink twenty times.”

Naturally all this excited the curiosity of the two Americans more than ever. Sid could hardly restrain himself, he was so anxious for the climax to arrive.

Just then Bob “put in his oar.”

“We are not the only ones who watch, it seems, Captain,” he remarked, casually.

“Kindly explain what you mean,” asked the officer, nervously.

“Look carefully over yonder,” the other told him, at the same time leveling his finger in a certain direction. “I certainly saw something glisten in the sunlight as though it might be a bayonet, or some weapon being

shifted. And you can notice that this trail we followed goes along still further, as if there might be another snug lookout a little further in advance of this place."

Captain Antonio actually turned pale.

"We must be more than ever careful not to attract the attention of the enemy to this part of the line," he went on to say, hoarsely, "for it is probable that those occupying that advanced post may be His Majesty the King, together with our idol of the Italian army, General Cadorna, and the two statesmen from Rome."

"Whew! that sounds interesting, I must say," remarked Sid, casting another look in the direction of the spot indicated.

Bob believed that what the officer had said must be the truth. The commanding general had himself selected this watch tower, so that his illustrious guests might have an unobstructed view of what was about to occur. He desired that they should see for themselves what marvels of speed those mountain climbers of his were; and how nothing in the shape of a cliff or dizzy height dismayed them.

The stage was now all set for the game, and the opening of the play could not be long de-

layed. Sid, trembling with impatience, only hoped the stagnation might not interfere with the complete carrying out of the programme. He anticipated a sight that would never be forgotten, and one that in itself must be well worth coming all those thousands of miles over a perilous sea to witness.

Before starting forth Captain Antonio had been wise enough to secure three pair of field-glasses of the latest pattern, made in France. Some of the officers who were supplied with binoculars would not be needing them just then, and had willingly loaned the glasses to the man who carried that wonderful paper from military Headquarters.

Thus they were able to scan everything that was going on in the rocky valley, as well as far up on that beetling peak where the steady drum of the big Austrian guns beat like a mighty trip-hammer.

Sid now became interested in seeking some signs of the Italian soldiers whom the captain had told them were in hiding below. By diligent search he believed he could catch an occasional glimpse of some slightly moving object that might be one of the intending climbers,

clad in the dark green attire that distinguishes the Italian military forces.

Somehow the fact comforted Sid. He felt that it was all *real*, and that a legion of heroes were lying concealed at the foot of the lofty height, only waiting until their hour struck to "go in."

Presently another idea occurred to him, and he mentioned it to his chum.

"Why not try to meet the Minister of the Navy after it's all over, and the royal party is coming back this way?" he asked.

"I was meaning to mention that to Captain Antonio here," Bob told him; "we agreed to leave it all in his hands, you remember. Possibly it might not be diplomatic to try and approach the party, for their guards might suspect us of having evil designs, and do something rash."

"Oh! of course I didn't mean to interfere with the plans of the captain at all," Sid hurriedly remarked. "He knows best how to manage the meeting. Fact is, Bob, I was hugging a secret hope that we might even be introduced to the King. I'd give a heap to meet him, and that's right. Besides Albert of Belgium the King of Italy is the one big heroic

figure among royalty, on the side of the Allies, anyway. He has stayed with his army pretty much all the time, and even shared in the dangers of the campaign against Trieste."

Captain Antonio caught all this, and looked very much pleased to hear the young American speak so splendidly of the King, who was the idol of the whole Italian race just then. He nodded his head but said nothing. Sid, who slyly noted this fact, decided that the captain would not let a chance slip by to bring them to the notice of his Royal Highness.

"Will that awful firing ever let up?" Sid was saying to Bob, as though the fact of its continuing irritated him.

"Not until the general himself gives the signal, I reckon," his chum replied. "And even after they start to climb the height I imagine it will keep going, to prevent the Austrians from picking off the men as they mount upward. They will be incapable of defending themselves, you understand. Even big stones dropped from such a distance would do terrible damage."

"But watch sharply, please," cautioned the officer.

Perhaps he knew from certain signs that

only a man trained in the Italian military service would be apt to notice that the fateful moment was rapidly approaching. Sid plucked up fresh hope. He once more clapped the binoculars to his eyes and looked first of all up at the lofty peak that seemed to reach well toward the drifting white clouds, and then along the rocks strewn below.

His ears, too, were strained to catch the sound that would mean the appointed time had come, and that Cadorna was satisfied with the stage setting he had ordered for the edification of his royal guest.

Suddenly Sid was electrified by a spirited picture. He did not catch the signal after all, and never knew what its nature may have been. What he did see was a line of men appearing from unnoticed recesses among the rocks. They sprang into view as though catapulted into action, each man with his gun secured to his back so that the weapon might not interfere with his freedom of action.

The fateful moment had come, and now they were about to be treated to a spectacle such as few people had ever witnessed—the scaling of an abrupt mountain peak by a



picked band of Italian climbing troops; one of the most inspiring feats imaginable.

No wonder then that both Sid and Bob fairly caught their breath in gasps as they stared, not wishing to lose a single feature of the wonderful adventure; while even the Italian captain's black eyes glistened with pride and hope and faith.

## CHAPTER VI.

## A CLIMB TO THE CLOUDS.

NO longer did the rocky depression at the foot of the height seem deserted, for a host of scrambling figures had flashed into view. One and all, those men were running forward at top speed, apparently seeking to gain the protection of the wall before the Austrian fire cut many of them down.

The Italian batteries had started in with renewed vigor, in order to render it so unhealthy along the edge of the hostile elevated rock trenches that no man could venture to show himself without incurring great danger of being killed. Every possible weapon was being employed to cause the enemy forces to huddle under their shelters while the running Italians were exposed in the open.

Here and there a man could be seen to topple over. Sid was at first horrified at observing such sights. By degrees, no doubt, he would become accustomed, perhaps even hard-

ened to it. Sometimes the soldier got upon his feet again, showing that it may have been a mere stumble on his part, or possibly a clever trick designed to prevent any hostile marksman from taking accurate aim.

Talking while such a frightful clamor was going on could not be indulged in to any extent, though if a chance came Sid was apt to take advantage of it. His heart seemed full almost to the bursting point, and unless he could manage to confide some of his feelings to a comrade his condition would be most precarious.

Now the leading Bersaglieri had managed to reach the foot of the first cliff, and without waiting to count the cost commenced the difficult ascent. Up they went in a manner that was most miraculous, and which aroused the admiration of the young Americans, who rubbed their eyes as though they half believed they must be dreaming.

Presently the whole side of the steep acclivity was dotted with nimble climbers, always shifting their positions, yet ever ascending foot by foot. Much of the time they would be screened from the observation of the enemy waiting above; for jutting rocks,

friendly bushes that cropped out of the hillside, and it might be scrub trees growing in a scattered fashion served to protect them.

Long practice had made those men almost perfect in their work. They knew full well how to take advantage of every object, and to utilize such things in their service.

The first quarter of the rise was overcome in a way that seemed magical. Then a greater task confronted them. A sheer cliff rose in their way. It might possibly be surmounted by an encircling movement, but such would not satisfy those agile climbers. Their education had all been along the line of going straight at any difficulty, instead of trying to circle around.

With the roar and crash of guns and exploding shells to serve as a dreadful accompaniment, the watchers now saw staged one of the most spectacular scenes ever devised in the brain of man.

At the foot of this cliff the men in dark green began to gather until there seemed a sufficiency for the purpose. Then at some signal from one of their leaders they began to climb in small detachments. Every fellow seemed to know just what his particular part of the

great upward movement might be. Some pushed; others climbed in advance, and then reached down a hand to those below. They nimbly mounted on each other's shoulders until six men stood thus like a veritable wall. Up this human ladder others scrambled until they drew themselves on to some narrow shelf which had been previously marked.

Almost before Sid could realize it the foremost man was seen to arrive at the top of that particular ascent. He never would have believed such a feat could be carried out; and after that nothing that he might hear with regard to the skill of these wonderful climbers would seem impossible. Jack and his Beanstalk by means of which he climbed into another world among the clouds came very close to Sid as he crouched there in his rock-bound retreat, and stared at the work of those highly trained athletes.

After that there was a spell of rather easy work, and then another cliff had to be ascended. They were now "getting up in the world," and somehow the Austrians above seemed to sense the fact that the peril was gradually drawing closer for them. Sid could see moving figures near the edge on the summit

of the peak, as though acting under orders some of the defenders of the lofty fortress were taking all manner of risks in order to halt the coming of the enemy.

Then a great mass of loose rock was detached from the edge and went crashing down, breaking into fragments and spraying the space below with flying missiles, each of which carried possible death along with it in the descent.

But still watching Sid discovered that the Italians were not to be caught napping. Evidently the adroit skipping aside so as to avoid any falling rock had also been a part of their education, to judge from the clever way in which they acted.

True, one man was struck, and fell all the way to the bottom where he lay inert as though devoid of life; but on the whole the designs of the Austrians failed to meet with any great success.

Of course they would continue to strike with all their might. Well did they realize that once those climbers arrived at the top, to swarm over the rock-bound trenches there, it "would all be over but the shouting," as Sid expressed it in his emphatic American fashion.



Upward still they went. If some venture-some marksman above began to annoy them with his fire the climbers would detach their guns and proceed to watch for him. Several times Sid saw this done, and in every instance a figure was seen to drop from above, and go whirling down to the bottom of the furthestmost wall.

Those Alpine trained soldiers had not spent months and years in their strange work without becoming proficient. They seemed a mechanical part of some great spouting fountain, urged upward by unseen but irresistible forces.

They leaped, they crept, they toiled, but always gaining, gaining foot by foot, yard after yard. If any of the doomed Austrians above managed to see their coming they must have greatly marveled, and wondered what earthly force might ever hold back such determined fighters, whom even the mountains could not deter.

There were times when ropes came into play, and were used with the greatest skill. Men swung fearlessly into space, dangled like huge pendulums, and then sprang to the point for which they had been aiming, the rope being flung backward for another pair of eager

hands to clutch. Sometimes the movement was as regular almost as the ticking of a clock.

Needless to say every man among those hundreds knew full well that the eye of the great Cadorna was upon him individually. This must have served as a stronger inspiration than the fact of the King and two of his Ministers being present; for Italian soldiers would go through fire and water for their beloved commander. His presence on the battle line was always worth as much as the coming of ten thousand fresh troops on the scene. He exercised some of the strange power that was always characteristic of Napoleon in his palmy days.

Finally it was seen that the venturesome men-goats were gathering in force at the base of the highest cliff, and that the supreme struggle was at hand. Sid and Bob took a fresh breath, and proceeded to settle down so as to watch the ending of the remarkable battle scene.

After all that climbing no doubt the men must be fatigued more or less. Would they be able to surmount this last obstacle in the way of complete success? Perhaps it might be deemed wise to call a halt, so as to allow

them to recuperate, and get in condition for the finish.

But no, nothing was to hold them in check, now that they had surmounted nine-tenths of the difficulties. Had a signal been given by the one in supreme command it is doubtful whether they would have heard, or hearing, obeyed, such was their exaltation. The same thing occurred at the battle of Missionary Ridge down near Chattanooga, when Grant sent his forces to take the Confederate batteries at the foot of the line of hills. Inspired with their initial success the boys in blue kept on climbing the ascent, led by those who carried the battle flags, until in the end they swarmed over the top, having accomplished a feat that had not been in the plans for that day's work at all.

Sid gripped the arm of his chum convulsively, though he never once took his eye from the small end of his binoculars, steadying his trembling hand against a portion of friendly rock close by.

He was almost at the point of collapse, through sheer excitement. Never in all his life had he felt as he did just then. If those gallant men who had done such amazing work

thus far failed to gain their end he believed he would faint through bitter disappointment.

Well, they were off again, and it would not be long before the result must be made plain. Surely they deserved everything that the fickle fortune of war could bestow upon them. How proud their general must be to watch their wonderful tactics, and know that the King, too, could see what devoted men he had wearing the service uniform.

Those on the summit had reserved all their remaining ammunition for a last concerted movement. They realized that as the Italians drew closer to the crest of the peak their supporting batteries would have to lift their fire lest they shoot down their own men.

It was during such a temporary lull in the bombardment that they expected to make one last effort to drive the climbing enemy back, or in some way decimate his numbers to such an extent that the mission upon which the force had embarked must prove a failure.

Up, still higher those clinging figures were creeping. Some of the more advanced had already passed the half-way mark, but did not even stop to take a fresh breath. Now a rain of rocks big and small commenced to fall upon

them, keeping them constantly engaged in dodging, and making use of their guns. These they apparently knew how to handle with all the accuracy of sharpshooters, even while clinging with one hand to some precarious hold.

So too the Austrians dropped vast quantities of hand grenades, of which they seemed to possess unlimited stores for just such an occasion. These bursting seemed to furrow the whole face of the cliff, so that it was indeed a marvel how any of the men clinging there managed to escape destruction.

Some did go down, as the watchers saw, with their hearts almost ceasing to beat, so great was their suspense. But after all it was little short of marvelous how the climbers managed to escape these manifold perils and continue their upward movement.

In all the annals of fighting with which he was familiar, Bob Hamilton did not believe there was a single instance recorded equal in bravery and recklessness to that assault on the mountain peak so well guarded by Nature, assisted by rock-ribbed Austrian trenches, and backed by every known modern weapon of warfare. Words would really fail him when at-

tempting to describe the picture as he saw it that afternoon, crouching in his retreat back of the advanced position where the King and Cadorna lay installed.

His confidence had been terribly shaken when he saw the burst of aggressiveness on the part of the desperate Austrian garrison. After watching, however, and discovering how in spite of everything the line kept on creeping upwards like the Hand of Fate once more Bob began to believe they were *going to succeed!*

Now some of the leaders were within striking distance of the crown. Fierce combats began to take place between the rivals who fought for possession of this pivotal peak, the occupation of which Cadorna believed absolutely essential to the success of his further plans. Men seized upon each other, and sometimes plunged downward still clutched in that death grip. Where one Italian fell another was ready to take his place, for they could be seen coming up like ants, constantly on the move, and closing in on the crown of the peak.

The Austrians were desperate by now. They exposed themselves recklessly, and in this manner many fell before the accurate fire of Italian marksmen posted in certain nearby



spots on the opposite hill, for this very purpose.

"Oh! why don't they make it?" Sid cried out in real anguish, for he was possessed of a dreadful fear lest after all failure be the portion of the gallant band of patriots.

"When enough have gathered to make a showing they'll pile over, never fear," Bob shouted in his ear, for it was impossible to be heard otherwise, with all that clamor going on.

The seconds seemed like hours, the minutes centuries to poor Sid, devoured with mixed feelings. But when he saw that in spite of all the Austrian garrison, rapidly being depleted, could accomplish, those reaching the top had grown rapidly in number, he took fresh heart and held on.

Grenades burst in the faces of those who tried to hurl them, such was the lack of space between the hostile forces. Sanguinary combats continued to mark the picture, but after all the desperate efforts of the garrison seemed futile. At least they only delayed the final event a little, and apparently no reinforcements could reach them there in their hour of need.

Then Sid saw that the time had come. Up

rose the crouching Italians, now breathing again after a little rest. When he discovered that a perfect swarm of figures wearing the dark green tunics of the mountaineers was pouring over the parapet of the rock-bound fortress he fairly cried for extreme joy. Seeing which Captain Antonio managed to thrust out one hand and pat Sid on the head in an appreciative fashion, though not for a second could he remove his entranced eyes from what was taking place up there in the mists of the lofty heights.

More and more figures kept arriving and vanishing from view. Dreadful scenes of carnage must be taking place beyond range of their vision. Although they could not see, they could readily picture what was going on there.

Those of the defenders of the high peak who had not by this time fallen at their posts must have surrendered, or else were trying to escape down the other side of the steep declivity, a feat almost impossible of accomplishment. No doubt nearly every member of the late garrison would be accounted for when the grand total was made up.

And while the Americans and Captain Antonio still continued to stare through a mist of

tears of joy what a thrill passed through them to suddenly see the Italian national colors thrown to the wind from the dizzy heights.

The coveted peak had thus been won by the valor of the Alpine mountaineers!

## CHAPTER VII.

AFTER THE LOFTY PEAK WAS WON.

CONGRATULATIONS, Captain Antonio!" cried the impulsive Sid, as he held out his hand to their guide and protector; indeed, he looked half inclined to throw his arms around the little Italian officer and give him a "bear hug."

Nothing more could be said, for from every quarter there arose the most frantic cheers, such as could only spring from Italian throats. Here, there and everywhere soldiers could be seen dancing excitedly about. They were showing by their enthusiasm under what a terrific strain they had been laboring while all this wonderful mountain fighting was going on, with the fortunes of war undecided until the very last.

Then once again loud detonations came from the captured peak, while great clouds of smoke arose. Sid took the alarm at once.

"What's happening now, do you think,

Captain? Oh! I hope those Austrians didn't lay a terrible trap, and have blown up the magazine, so as to destroy all our brave fellows, after they worked so hard to win out?"

"Have no fear, young signor," the other assured him. "On the contrary, it is my compatriots who have turned the big guns around, and commenced to shell some other hostile battery that now comes within range. It was mostly for that the peak had to be carried, you see."

This news eased the strain on Sid's mind. He could even begin to think of other things now, and especially the fact that those eminent personages would possibly have to pass close by when they left their observation post.

"Don't forget, please, Captain," he went on to say in a wheedling tone, "that you as much as promised us to let the Minister of the Navy know a representative of the Fairbanks aerial torpedo inventor is here, and waiting to have an interview with him. And besides, I'd never forget it if I might have the honor of shaking hands with General Cadorna, and perhaps your illustrious King too; though I must confess I'm not much on royalty, being a democratic American at heart."

"I promise you I shall endeavor to arrange an interview at the earliest possible moment; more than that I dare not say at present. In such things we have to govern ourselves by circumstances, you understand."

"I imagine," remarked Bob just then, "those who occupy that advanced post of observation, whoever they may be, are about to make a change of base."

After taking a look the officer agreed with Bob.

"And just as I expected would prove to be the case, it is the King, and those others I spoke of. You can tell General Cadorna from his uniform, though he too is more or less democratic, like your famous Grant, and wears no gaudy clothes or decorations save on state occasions. Please keep back of me, and salute when you see me raise my hand so. Even Americans are expected to do this; you know it long ago became an accepted saying 'When in Rome do as the Romans do.' "

"You can count on us to use common-sense every time, Captain," Bob assured him in order to set any fears at rest.

The party quickly came into view. Besides the four exalted personages some others in uni-



form were present, doubtless officers high in rank. Sid could not help thinking that if only the Austrian gunners had known where these parties were located, and could have concentrated their fire in that particular quarter they might have made a wonderful ten-strike that would have changed the complexion of things to a radical degree.

“They appear to be in somewhat of a hurry, seems like, Bob?” suggested the other; “and notice how they keep looking overhead all the time, as though they expected a shell to drop down from the sky. Oh! would you believe it, there’s one of those sneaking airplanes coming from behind the peak that’s just been taken. I really suspect it’s an Austrian machine. They must mean to hover over the crest, and send down a rain of bombs on the new garrison.”

Captain Antonio uttered a startled cry.

“It is worse, much worse than that, young signor!” he exclaimed, trembling all over with sudden alarm. “They have guessed that our general, yes, and perhaps the King also, lay hidden where they could observe the carrying of the peak; and they have sent yonder bird-man out to try to drop one of his infernal

bombs upon the party. That is why they are hastening this way so fast. See, now they commence to actually run, though one of the Ministers is hardly built for such athletic exercise."

It was a singular thing to watch a King actually running, as though he were but an ordinary personage. Sid could hardly believe he saw aright. But as they had by now also discovered the coming airplane, and anticipated its mission, they certainly had to cast all dignity to the winds, and sprint for safety.

The nearest point that offered any sort of an asylum seemed to be the rocky shelter where Bob and Sid and the Captain stood; and it was in that direction they headed. Faster they came, and fortunately the grade was downward, if anything. Had it been otherwise one of the runners at least might have failed to make it in time, for the speeding 'plane was coming rapidly, the keen-eyed pilot having doubtless caught sight of his intended royal quarry.

He swooped rather low, scorning the fire of the many guns that were being trained upon him. Missiles were bursting in the air all around, and doubtless a perfect hailstorm of

bullets sped past, far and near; but even this failed to cause him to abate one particle of his swoop.

Urged on by the desperate nature of the impending peril the party now came on in great shape. Bob believed they would manage to make the shelter in time, though his glasses told him that the man accompanying the pilot of the battle plane was getting ready to throw his first bomb.

When he saw his arm make a sudden movement Bob felt his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth with fear. What a dreadful thing if that valiant sovereign and his right bower among all the Italian generals met with a catastrophe there before the very eyes of himself and chum!

Fortunately that bomb went astray. It exploded on the hillside some distance down the declivity. Bob drew a breath of relief. But the Austrian 'plane was still rushing on, and the second attempt might meet with better success than had come to the initial trial.

The runners however were now very near. One more burst of speed and they could expect to find themselves safely under the rocky roof that already covered the trio awaiting them.

Captain Antonio crowded back as far as space allowed, so as to leave that much more room for the newcomers; and seeing this the two Americans hastened to follow his example.

So the little party came crowding in, panting for breath, and yet doubtless quite satisfied to have found shelter, with that ferocious king-baiter hovering overhead.

Hardly had they dropped flat than there was a sharp detonation outside, and pieces of shattered rock flew this way and that. The second bomb had struck the trail just where the King and Cadorna had passed over five seconds before. Only for their haste in seeking shelter from the iron rain they must have been more or less seriously injured.

Cadorna immediately stepped out again to see what had become of the adventurous enemy. He could appreciate a brave man at his true value, even though he be his foe. Bob too had managed to pass beyond the shelter of that rocky roof, partly to make more room for the newcomers, and hence he was enabled to look aloft and see the dramatic finish of the adventure.

Even as Bob looked he felt a thrill when he saw the battleplane give a sudden lurch that

told of a hit. The pilot struggled desperately to regain control of his engine, but whatever had happened proved too much for his ingenuity. The machine began to drop, righted once, and then plunged furiously to the ground. Bob turned his head away so that he might not see it strike; he felt that he could not bear anything more, being already surfeited with horrors. Although the thing hardly seemed possible, he fancied that he could tell when the wrecked plane struck the rocks far below.

That part of the tragedy was finished. Bob was surprised to see the general lift his military cap briefly, and stand uncovered. It was his simple tribute to a brave foeman caught in the iron grip of Destiny. The Austrian pilot had been trying to encompass his own death, it is true, but that did not detract from his valor.

When Captain Antonio stood at salute both Sid and Bob did likewise, for they belonged to the military forces of Uncle Sam, as has been said before, and knew what measure of respect was due high rank, even if not accustomed to meeting royalty face to face.

The king beckoned to the officer, and exchanged a few sentences with him. Evidently

he was puzzled to account for the presence of the two young Americans in khaki. Sid waited in more or less suspense. He was wondering if this glorious opportunity to say that he had actually shaken hands with the Italian king, and General Cadorna as well, was going to slip past him or not. But no, Captain Antonio was now beckoning in turn to them; and with hats in hand the pair drew near.

It was indeed a proud moment for Sid and Bob when they were greeted in a democratic fashion by the monarch of all Italy, and in turn by General Cadorna; also the two cabinet ministers whose hands controlled the affairs of State for the entire kingdom.

Bob realized that Captain Antonio must have mentioned what his mission there might be, for the head of the naval forces on grasping his hand cordially went on to say in excellent English:

“You then have come all the way over here from America to talk with me about the wonderful aerial torpedo with which we have been conducting such remarkable experiments on board our naval vessels, and in connection with our air service? I shall be returning to Rome presently, when I hope to have more than one



interview with you, at which all particulars can be settled. Of one thing be assured, young signor, we are well pleased with your compatriot's invention. If arrangements can be made looking to our handling the same it promises to have considerable to do with shortening this terrible war."

Bob beamed with satisfaction. Then it looked as if his mission would be crowned with success. He rejoiced for many reasons, and not the least among these was the fact that the old inventor in whose cause he was enlisted chanced to be the grandfather of one Lucille Fairbanks, as pretty a black-eyed daughter of Virginia as any one could imagine. Bob ought to know, because did he not carry her saucy yet bewitching face next his heart right then?

"I have instructed Captain Borgia," said the King just then, bestowing a smile on the two sturdy young fellows, "to see that you have a good time while at the front. We are pleased to see some of our American cousins here with us, and only hope the day may not be so very long in coming when your enlightened people will feel it the part of duty to line up alongside ourselves and our valiant Allies for justice to small nations, and international

peace among all men. If I can do anything further to make it pleasant for you here, let me know; though affairs of grave moment occupy nearly every moment of my time just now."

That was all the King said, but every word of his speech was engraven on the hearts and memories of the adventurous pair. They could never be forgotten, no matter if the boys lived to three score and ten years of age.

The party now left the shelter and proceeded toward the rear. Apparently from their animated conversation, accompanied with considerable gestures, they were one and all delighted with the magnificent showing made by the Alpine regiments, and the gallant manner in which they had taken the lofty peak. It had long been a veritable thorn in the side of Cadorna, interfering as it did with his best plans for an advance toward strongly fortified Goritz.

"Does that mean we are to be allowed to stay around here for a day or two, while waiting for the Naval Minister to confer longer with the King, and the leading general?" asked Sid, when they again found themselves alone.

"Yes, that is what it means, young signor,"

replied the polite captain. "Doubtless there is some important combined action with the army and navy contemplated by the authorities, and they are now having councils of war. This attack chanced to come along while the meetings were in progress, and they had to be abandoned so that the inspiring sight might be enjoyed. If it should happen that you are kept several days here along the Italian trenches possibly I may manage it so that you will not consider your time wholly wasted."

At that impulsive Sid seized and wrung his hand furiously.

"As if that could ever be," he said, reproachfully. "Why, already we have been a thousand times repaid for all our trouble, and what little danger we ran from the slinker boats in the Mediterranean. That glorious spectacle to which we have just been treated will always remain with me as the most memorable event of my whole life. Really and truly, Captain Antonio, I expect to lift my cap every time I hear any mention of your brave soldiers. They have quite won my heart, for a fact."

"I suppose that winds up the excitement for today?" suggested Bob.

“Was it not sufficient?” laughed the other, exultantly. “Surely our army has won imperishable glory this very day, and those tired heroes deserve a rest. But tomorrow they will stand ready to repeat the performance. It is what they have learned best of all. No mountain peak that can be scaled by human forces could stand long before their attack. And so, mile by mile we expect to win the road to Trieste, over which one of these days will float the same flag that now flies from yonder peak. Once our foes said it was impregnable, but you have seen what Italian valor may accomplish. We have put our hand to the plow, and will not turn back, no matter how roughly the fortunes of war may treat us.”

And so Bob was coming to the conclusion that after all the various nations of the big world were pretty much alike; every one of them had valiant men enlisted under its banner, who were capable, each in his own fashion, of showing deeds worthy of heroes, though they might occupy different fields. There had been a time when Bob, puffed out with a sense of American bravery, had not thought so much of the Italian soldiery, and their ways of conducting warfare. He would never allow him-

self to fall into such an error again. What he had seen that day had given him a new conception of things; the old had passed away, and Bob saw facts as they were, without prejudice.

They too walked back toward the camps in the rear of the rock trenches. Evening was close by, and much as Sid would have liked to examine those cleverly constructed defences, always in condition to meet any attack on the part of the desperate enemy, he knew he had better postpone all this until a more fitting time. This no doubt would come with the morning, when he meant to carry out his plans.

So the darkness settled down upon that region where day after day, and often from sunset to sunrise as well, the ponderous discharge of big guns tortured the silence. Those canyons and peaks and ridges almost nightly glowed in the blinding flash of bursting shells, blasting a way through the solid rock.

"I wonder whether we'll be able to sleep any tonight, with that fierce racket apt to break loose any hour?" Sid remarked later on.

They were sitting where they could catch some heat from a blazing fire at which the mess cook busied himself, just as if the business of

eating had to be taken care of, no matter what else happened.

"Oh! I'm not worrying about that," Bob assured him. "In fact, now that the Italians have finally succeeded in capturing that offensive peak I rather imagine we shall have a quiet night of it."

"But the Austrians may make a counter attack, which I understand is the usual programme," objected the other, as if to air his wonderful knowledge of war matters.

Bob laughed as though quite amused.

"Stop and think before settling that in your mind, old fellow," he jeeringly remarked. "Try to imagine any one attempting to make that climb in the night-time. It was mad enough in broad daylight, and utterly impossible once the sun has set. No, I am counting on having a let-up to the firing for a few hours. And I've made up my mind to get some sleep, come what will."

"Count me in then," said Sid, promptly, "because I've lost a lot that I must make up. And, Bob, while we sit here taking things easy we might as well try to figure out what we want to do tomorrow."

"Better let all that go until we see daylight



again," advised his comrade. "Both of us are tired, and we've undergone a nervous tension today that has weakened us more or less."

As usual Bob had his way, because what he said really appealed to the other's common sense. So they lounged there, resting, and waiting to be summoned to supper. Sid at least felt that he could indulge in a little mild speculation with regard to the character of the meal soon to be spread before them. At any rate it smelled all right, and he felt himself growing more and more hungry constantly. He also remembered that Italian *chefs* have had a reputation for cookery second only to the French.

"Only?" mused Sid, reflectively, with past memories haunting him unpleasantly, "I do certainly hope he won't want to flavor every dish with that horrible garlic, because it just spoils things for my taste. For two cents I'd like to give him a tip that he hold his hand when tempted to indulge—a 'woodman spare that tree' sort of entreaty, backed by a coin of the realm, a regular gold boy at that. But thank goodness he seems ready to call out that supper's served, and so far I haven't got a single whiff of garlic!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

## NIGHT AFTER THE BATTLE.

IT was a pretty good supper in spite of all Sid's groundless fears, and as they were quite hungry the chums enjoyed it immensely. Best of all the supply was not limited in the least; and that part of the programme is what appeals most of all to the heart of young America.

"I reckon the Italian Government looks after its fighters all right," remarked Sid, toward the close of the meal.

Captain Antonio heard what he said, and indulged in one of his pleasant smiles that always disclosed his white teeth.

"Men can fight best if well fed," he explained. "Of course you will say that history presents many cases where half-starved legions have carried forlorn hopes, which is very true; but after all soldiers are like the rest of us. A hungry and shivering man sees things from the wrong angle. The world looks bleak to

him, and he begins to wonder whether it is worth while fighting any longer. So in these modern days the army mess chest is well looked after."

"Tell me, Captain," Bob was saying, softly, for he did not wish every one about the fire to hear what he remarked, "did the commander-in-chief and the rest of the party leave here? I haven't seen any sign of them since they came in from that outpost."

Captain Antonio looked around him, and put a hand up to his chin in a cautious fashion as he replied in an undertone.

"Yes, that is so, young signor, but please do not mention it. The movements of the King and our general are kept quiet, as a rule. They appear suddenly here, there or it may be on another front entirely. There is of course an object in such secrecy, several of them in fact."

"I can easily understand why it should be kept quiet," admitted Bob, while Sid leaning forward listened eagerly. "After what we saw of the Austrian methods with their air service it might be very dangerous for the movements of those high in command to be made public property. There is always a chance of a spy being around who could find some means for

signaling his important discoveries to those in the hostile camp."

"But the Allies do the same thing, you know," interrupted Sid, "for I remember reading several times how the Kaiser had a narrow escape from being struck by a bomb dropped by an aviator."

"That's right," agreed Bob. "Once the engine of his private train was disabled in that way; and again a building he had been occupying was bombed just an hour after the Emperor had left it. All that sort of thing is fair in war, and nobody would complain if that was the worst the Teutons did. It's the sinking of merchant vessels filled with innocent women and babies, like the *Lusitania*, that makes clean fighters grit their teeth, and detest those who fire the murderous torpedoes."

Of course this sort of talk pleased the Italian captain immensely. Others of the officers who sat around the camp fire, not speaking English, did not understand what they were talking about; but Captain Antonio rubbed his hands together, and nodded smilingly as he went on to say:

"It is bound to come in time, sooner or later, the entrance of your great and glorious

republic into this terrible world war. Surely the sinking of that ship with more than a hundred of your people aboard, many of them helpless women and children, must hasten the day. We in Italy are praying that it may come soon, for we believe it will make victory the more certain; though whether you come in or stay out we Allies are sworn to hang together until we have won our cause."

And after what Bob and Sid had witnessed on that wonderful day they were of the opinion that no truer words could have been spoken. Surely history has no brighter page than would record the achievement of the taking of that towering peak, buttressed and fortified as it was with innumerable batteries, machine-guns, and every imaginable means of defense.

"It's a queer thing to mention when we're talking of such lofty things," Sid spoke up, "but I was wondering whether the boys could spare a tent for strangers tonight? I imagine they haven't any superabundance of covers, and the nights are right chilly over here in the region you people call 'Italia Irredenta.' "

"Ah! then make your mind easy on that score," nodded the accommodating captain,

“for we have already been supplied along that line. Cast your eye over yonder and you will see an extra large tent of khaki-colored canvas. That has been apportioned to us for the duration of our stay in this camp.”

“Whew! it looks much finer than any other in sight, as sure as you live!” burst out the pleased Sid; “and there’s a fine silken flag fastened at the entrance in the bargain. I reckon now, Captain, that tent is above par, and must have been occupied by a general at least.”

“Your guess falls far short, young signor. It was the king’s tent last night and the one before. Since he has gone away it would be empty, and at the special order of His Majesty, who is very much interested in your mission over here, it has been placed at our disposal.”

The pair exchanged proud looks.

“Think of it, Bob,” said Sid, his eyes sparkling, “one of us may actually sleep on an army cot that only last night gave a royal personage his rest. That will be a feather in our cap, to tell, when we get back home in old Richmond, don’t you understand?”

“Oh! I don’t imagine my sleep will be any sounder on account of it,” chuckled democratic Bob, and then hastily adding as though he



feared lest his words might shock the captain: "but it was mighty thoughtful and kind of His Majesty to remember us as he did, and for that I'd like to thank him heartily. After all, kings are only human beings like the rest of us. In this war though some of them have managed to get pretty close to the hearts of their loyal subjects by sharing their sufferings in the field, and depriving themselves of all luxuries at home in the palace."

The time passed, and of course the guests of the camp saw many things that aroused their interest. The fact that they wore the khaki, and belonged to the Virginia National Guard at home, made their presence there seem like a tie binding the struggling Allies with the powerful republic across the sea. So again and again were they the objects of sincere attention on the part of other officers, who chose to magnify the facts, and see fresh comfort in their association.

As the hour grew late the camp began to settle down. Fighting is hard work, and especially when conducted in such a country as this eastern shore of the Adriatic. There rocky mountains and plateaus abounded, and a thousand strongholds cunningly contrived through

years of preparation by an artful foe had to be reduced one by one.

Many of the soldiers were already sprawled out on the ground sleeping, as though danger did not give them a moment's apprehension. Those who had blankets used them, while the rest either slept under such tents as were provided, or else crept closer to the fires, so as to receive a portion of their warmth. They were a rugged lot, used to roughing it, and made ideal soldiers, Bob thought.

Back further lay the temporary hospitals. Sid wanted to visit these, but had been influenced by his comrade to forego the experience until morning, when most of the more severe operations would have been finished. Sid had leanings toward surgery, and frequently declared his intention of following such a pursuit later on in life. Whether he would or not remained to be seen. Young fellows often change their minds with regard to the vocation they plan to follow; it may be a mere passing whim; or else something arises to cause them to switch off to another line.

At length Sid began to yawn at a terrific rate, seeing which, his chum realized that it was time they sought their cots.

When the other officers saw them head toward the large tent that had been occupied by the King himself on the previous night they doubtless felt more convinced than ever that the visit of the two Americans must be connected with some important conference looking to the anticipated help from Uncle Sam. This hope and expectation dwelt in myriads of hearts throughout Italy, France and Great Britain, Bob learned later on. Especially was this so at the critical time when the great ocean liner was sent down by the cowardly attack of an under-sea boat.

"Well, this looks mighty comfy," remarked the appreciative Sid.

They had entered the dingy looking but commodious tent, preceded by the captain bearing a lighted lantern very similar to those they were accustomed to at home, and which may have been imported from the States, for all they knew.

Three cots were found in the place, one for each of them, it seemed. Possibly His Majesty had attendants near by when making the rounds of the various fronts; or more likely still those other two cots may have been occu-

pied by some of his aides who also served as his guardians, should the need ever arise.

Sid shook his head as though puzzled.

"We can of course never tell which was the particular cot the King slept on," he remarked dejectedly, "the only way for us to do is to change about, so that if we stay here three nights each of us can sleep on a different bed. In that way we'll be able to say we occupied the cot which His Majesty had before us."

Captain Antonio only smiled, but possibly he may have wondered why republican lads should think so much about coming in contact with royalty. After all he must have concluded human nature is pretty much the same the world over, no matter under what form of government.

"Oh! well, take your pick for tonight then, Sid," his chum told him, as though it might be a matter of indifference to him. "Any old thing is good enough for me when I'm sleepy, though of course I prefer to have things fairly decent."

Sid hesitated as though he found it hard to choose. One cot looked just the same as the others. Apparently the King was not willing to accept any special favors on account of his

royal position; an army cot and a blanket satisfied him when in the field, for he was every inch a soldier.

Finally Sid made his choice and hastened to get under the covers. Captain Antonio would of course look after the lantern, for he was acting as their host.

"One good thing," yawned Sid, as he rolled over and tucked himself in, "affairs seem to have quieted down more or less out there on the ridges toward Gorizia. I begin to think our friends the enemy mean to conserve their ammunition by not firing another shot tonight. They'll need all they've got, especially if the Italian army manages to cut the railway line running into Trieste, for then everything would have to be brought around by sea from Fiume."

"I notice that you're getting these names down pat nowadays," chuckled Bob. "Time was and you wouldn't have known there was such a place on the face of the globe as Fiume. Now it just rolls off your tongue as smoothly as Petersburg, or Luray Caverns at home."

"Oh! of course I know Fiume is the big Austrian naval base on the Adriatic," Sid hastened to say in explanation; "fact is, the only

seacoast Austria has runs along this shore. If Italy has her way, and seizes what she aims to get, there isn't going to be any navy for Austria, because she'll have no port of call any more than Switzerland has. Well, good-night, Captain, and you too, Bob. Wake me if anything exciting happens, please; and whatever you do don't let me stay asleep if you hear breakfast's ready."

With that he drew the blanket, perhaps the royal covering, over his shoulders, and proceeded to close his eyes to the world.

Bob was not long in copying his example, and soon afterwards the lantern having been extinguished a sort of half darkness reigned inside the king's tent.

As fires would doubtless be kept burning here and there during the entire night it was not likely to be real dark at any time between then and morning, but it seemed just right for sleeping, Bob thought.

Lying there he could hear the measured tread of sentries walking to and fro. He also caught their "all's well" in Italian when they chanced to come in contact at the ends of their respective beats. It pleased Bob, possessed of the soldier blood coming down from mili-



tary ancestors back along the whole line, to know that he was billeted in a genuine war camp. Men lay all around him who had that very day been engaged in a most absorbing fight, and won a wonderful victory. This thought gave him much more pleasure than the fact that possibly he occupied the cot where the Italian king had rested on the preceding night.

Finally Bob fell asleep, for he was very tired, and the novelty of his surroundings had begun to wear away. Sid seemed to be far gone, if regular breathing could be taken as any indication of his condition. The chances of anything happening to cause them alarm seemed very slight indeed.

Sid must have slept for hours, though when he awoke after some sort of peculiar dream that had a connection with the thrilling events of the past day he had not the slightest idea whether one hour or six had passed, for there was no means of telling.

He was in a half conscious condition, ready to drop asleep again presently. The tread of the sentries' feet came to him at intervals. At first he could hardly remember where he was,

but it dawned on him in time, and he sighed with satisfaction to realize that he was so comfortably fixed. Perhaps too he may even have chuckled on thinking about being given the tent and cot occupied by an exalted personage.

Sid was feeling so well satisfied that he lacked the energy to even raise his arm and draw the covers more tightly around his shoulder, exposed to the cooling night air.

All at once he felt a slight sensation pass over him, an odd feeling that bordered on surprise. Surely something was moving inside the tent, for he caught a faint rustling sound. Could it be possible that a dog or some other animal, a pet or mascot of the Italian regiment surrounding them, had crept under the canvas in search of food?

Sid gently turned his head just a trifle, meaning to look around him. There was not a great deal of light, but by straining his eyes, sleepy no longer at least, he believed he might manage to see.

Yes, there *was* some bulky object there that had not been inside the tent at the time he lay down to rest. It stirred too, Sid saw, with a feeling of alarm. Was it possible that one of

his companions had arisen; but what could cause any one to crouch there?

Sid began to feel more uneasy than ever, and obeying a sudden inspiration he suddenly sat upright on his cot.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE MYSTERIOUS INTRUDER.

**W**HO'S that?" demanded Sid, boldly. Seeing the figure of a man rise up he scrambled off his cot, and recklessly hurled himself forward to make a football tackle. While Sid managed to clutch hold of the mysterious unknown intruder he did not secure a grip which could be maintained. So he found himself dashed aside. Just then Bob gained an upright position, filled with wonder and amazement at such riotous proceedings, and unable to understand what it meant.

"Grab him, somebody, quick!" gasped Sid, who had fallen on his hands and knees; but the shadowy figure had already vanished from view, apparently passing out by the same avenue he had used as a means of entrance.

They heard a sentry harshly challenge, and then came a shot, several of them in fact. The camp was instantly astir. Men could be heard

running this way and that, and loud voices sounded.

Bob and Sid were hastily getting into such clothes as they had discarded on retiring. Both seemed very much excited, nor could any one blame them for their upset condition.

Captain Antonio was ready to dart out as soon as his charges had hastily donned clothing and shoes. No one stopped to adjust his leggings, for they were eager to ascertain whether any result had come from those hasty shots fired after the vanishing mysterious prowler.

There were scores gathered around, and one of the sentries seemed to be explaining what he had done, if his handling of his gun meant anything. Captain Antonio took it upon himself to also ask questions, and then turning to Bob he explained.

"He says the party ran in that direction, which leads to the ravine. We might take a look there, and see if he did drop his man as he firmly believes."

Procuring a couple of lighted lanterns he led the way, the sentry and several officers accompanying him. Bob and Sid fell in, wondering greatly at it all. Why should a stranger

have selected their tent of all those in the camp for his early morning visit; for they now saw from the position of the stars overhead that the time was somewhere around three o'clock.

Presently the man who had fired the first shot stopped short. He was pointing to the ground at his feet as though to signify that this was about the place where the fleeing figure had been when he used his gun.

Those who carried the lanterns flashed them around. If they hoped to make any gruesome discovery they were doomed to disappointment, for there was not any sign of a body in sight.

"Didn't get him after all," said Sid, when this fact had become patent.

"Still he seems to feel confident that he had the man covered when he pulled the trigger of his gun," Captain Antonio went on to say, in a puzzled manner.

"After all, he may only have wounded him," Bob observed, sagaciously. "That ought to be easy to prove one way or another. Please let me have your light a bit, Captain. We have been raised in the school of Boy Scouts over in America, and perhaps some tracks can be found that will tell us the truth."



He instantly began to search the ground for signs, at the same time requesting the captain to keep every one back until he had carefully covered the space around him. Hardly had half a minute elapsed when Bob looked up and beckoned.

"Please come here, Captain, and you too, Sid. That sentry was right. He must have winged his man, for you can see specks of fresh blood here on the rock!"

When the Italian captain saw with his own eyes that this was so he gave Bob a look of sincere admiration. Some of the others too chattered volubly as they grasped the situation. The sentry stood up very straight, and looked pleased because he had been thus vindicated.

Bob commenced to follow the trail of blood specks. It was easily done, for they showed very plainly on the rocks. The fugitive, wounded as he had been, must have headed straight for the ravine close by, and which he doubtless also used when entering the Italian camp.

They continued to move along, leaving the camp back of them. Fully fifty men had followed, being eager to ascertain whether the

intruder could have fallen through weakness caused by loss of blood.

"It ends here," said Bob, abruptly, as he arose to his full height.

"But I do not see any body," ventured the Captain, as he turned his puzzled eyes to the right and to the left.

"Oh! I'm sorry to say he's got clear," the American told him. "You see, the blood spots stop all at once. That means the man held up long enough to bandage his wound, which must have been on his left arm I've decided. He knew that he was leaving a trail behind him; and besides he may have begun to feel weak. No matter, we couldn't follow him any further over these rocks, with nothing left to serve as a guide."

"Then he's gotten clean away, Bob, is that what you mean?" asked Sid.

"I reckon that covers the bill," came the answer.

So they returned to the camp, though several of the men under the direction of an officer remained to search carefully, in hopes of discovering the unknown hiding amidst some of the scrub thickets that formed the main part of the ravine.

Once more the trio were inside their tent. None of them looked at all sleepy now, and in fact Bob and Sid had never felt more wide-awake than just then.

"Well, I must say this has been a mighty queer happening," remarked Sid, rubbing his left arm as though he might have bruised it when sprawling on the floor of the tent, after being hurled aside so roughly by the uninvited guest.

"It certainly has been," agreed Bob, seriously. "Who could that fellow have been, and why should he pick out *our* tent for his stealing operations? Perhaps they all expect every American, young and old, must be just rolling in wealth, and that we'd make fat pickings. But what makes you keep on rubbing your arm so, Sid?"

"Why, I must have hurt it a little when I was tumbled over, for it seems to be smarting more or less," explained the other.

"Suppose you take off your coat, and let me see," said Bob.

"Oh! it's hardly worth while, Bob; but since you say so I suppose I might as well," with which remark he started to remove his outer garment.

As he did so he commenced to stare at his arm, for his shirt-sleeve was stained with fresh blood. Bob uttered a cry, while the captain's swarthy face grew strangely black. As for Sid himself he looked as though he could hardly believe his eyes.

"What d'ye suppose that means?" he was muttering. "Why, I couldn't have hurt myself as badly as all that, and feel so little pain. Bob, roll up my sleeve, will you, and let's see what causes it."

Ten seconds later and all of them were staring at a small but clean cut that extended for an inch or so across Sid's forearm. It was only a slight wound, hardly more than a severe "scratch," the injured one hastened to remark, but Bob saw more than this.

"You didn't get such a hurt by falling, let me tell you, Sid!" he declared. "That cut has been made by some sharp instrument. And as sure as you live here it is now, lying on the floor of the tent, just where he dropped it when you closed with him."

With the words Bob suddenly bent and picked some object up. It was plainly a knife, and had an exceedingly sharp edge. The captain held out his hand for the weapon, and Bob

could see how it trembled as though some deep emotion had seized hold upon him.

Carefully he examined the object he held. Then he turned his sparkling eyes on the two others, and they could see it was rage that caused his orbs to dance and scintillate.

"This tool was never made in Italy," he said, "nor yet in Austria. I have been in Bulgaria for some years, and there I have seen and handled many such blades."

"What! Bulgaria?" gasped the astonished Sid. "Now whatever would cause a Bulgar to creep into this camp and act the spy? He must have been hand in glove with the Austrians, because they are allies now, though once deadly enemies."

"Oh! war often makes strange bed fellows," sneered the officer, still balancing the oddly-shaped knife in his hand. "Think of those same Bulgars fighting side by side with the ferocious Bashi Bazouks of Turks, whose hands have always been red with the blood of Bulgarian people. Yes, this creeper was of that race; and I shudder to think what his presence inside this same tent might signify."

"Oh! you mean that perhaps he believed it was still occupied by the King?" said Sid,

looking horrified at what that idea conjured up in his brain, with the murderous looking weapon to substantiate the dreadful suspicion.

The captain nodded his head, and gritted his strong white teeth angrily.

“You can see for yourselves, young signors,” he went on to say in a choking voice. “It may be that he expected to find some important maps and army documents here in this tent, which he could seize, and hand over to the Austrian generals; but he was prepared to sell his life dearly, perhaps even to take that of our beloved sovereign. It only goes to prove how desperate our enemies must be getting when they could descend to murder in order to bolster up their failing cause.”

“How about wanting to sleep in this royal tent a second night, Sid?” asked Bob, silyly, but at this the other shrugged his shoulders and said briskly:

“Oh! I’m game, all right, Bob. A little thing like that doesn’t scare me any. Besides, lightning seldom strikes in the same place twice, you know they say. More than that we can have a regular cordon of sentries around the next time. I’ve already picked out the cot you’ve got for my next choice.”



"You Americans are brave enough, that is certain," asserted the captain, on hearing this.

"I wonder now could I have that nice little blade with the razor edge, just for a sort of memento of this occasion?" Sid went on to say, jocularly. "I'd like to show it whenever I happen to mention this occurrence to the boys. They'll be more apt to put some faith in my yarn if I can hold it up and let them feel that edge. I'm lucky to get off as easily as I did, after rubbing against that steel."

"Later on," promised the officer, "after I have shown the knife to the commander-in-chief, and explained where, and under what conditions it was found, I expect that you can have it for your own. It is an ugly contrivance, and no doubt the late owner must have been a bold customer, though I do not like his methods of gaining army secrets."

Bob meanwhile was proceeding to wash the slight wound, and apply a soothing lotion, after which he fastened some bandage tape around the arm. Sid laughed as though amused, and pretended to make light of the matter.

"Just to think that after all I've gone and got myself wounded in this scrimmage over

here," he observed, with a grimace, as Bob drew the bandage tighter, and a sharp little pain shot through the muscles of his arm.

"But don't flatter yourself, my boy, that yours is the first and only American blood to be shed on the battlefields of this war. Tens of thousands of Americans are serving in the French army, and also with the Canadians. Others are in the aviation corps, and giving a glorious account of themselves in fighting for the ideals they uphold. Hundreds have already fallen, and before all this business is over we may be in the field with millions of our young men, ranged alongside the Union Jack, the tricolor of France, and the flag of Italy!"

Captain Antonio lifted his military cap as if in salute, while his lips moved, though no sound came forth; doubtless he was whispering a prayer that the words last spoken by this gallant young American might eventually come true, for such he knew was the earnest wish of every officer in the army of the King.

"I have a little favor to request of you both, young signors," the officer was saying. "It is that you will please say nothing whatever of what we have just been conversing, and the

finding of this murderous Bulgar blade. It must rest with those higher up in rank whether they wish the army to know. Perhaps, just before the next push they may choose to proclaim the fact, so as to put fresh fury into the hearts of the soldiers."

"We give you our word, Captain," said Bob, sincerely.

"It is as good as your bond, of that I am certain," observed the other simply, but with all his heart in the few words.

"And, Captain," added Sid, "I really don't think your soldiers need anything like that to spur them on so as to accomplish heroic deeds. After what we watched them carry out this past day, sir, I would not put anything beyond them. There is no finer body of enlisted men on the face of the globe than these right around us. And why shouldn't they make the best of fighters when we remember how their ancestors ruled the world by reason of might, in the days of old."

All this sort of talk made Captain Antonio look quite pleased. He even seemed to forget for the time being the anger that had gripped his soul upon learning what species of Bulgar treachery was afoot in the Italian camp.

“Let us then go back to our cots, young signors,” he proposed, “and see if we cannot get a little more sleep. It will be several hours before reveille arouses the camp, and in these perilous times it is wise to get rest when you can.”

No one offered any objection to that plan, and so they all turned in. Perhaps Sid for one did not sleep quite so soundly as before, because he had just been through an exciting experience. Every time he chanced to work the muscles of his left arm, a little twinge of pain reminded him that he may have really had a narrow escape. Of course he would never know whether his wound was the result of a mere accident, or if the intruder, enraged at being discovered in his work, had, before making off, actually intended to severely injure the one who gave the alarm.

It was the clear, silvery call of a bugle sounding the reveille that after all aroused the trio, and they found that daylight was at hand. Nothing further of an unpleasant nature had occurred during the remainder of that night, for which all of them felt grateful. This thing of being suddenly aroused, to meet some

species of deadly peril face to face, was not the most pleasant thing in the world.

Just then the hoarse boom of an Austrian howitzer, causing the earth to quiver under their feet, announced business was ready to begin again at the old stand. Doubtless before the setting of another sun hundreds upon hundreds of madly contesting men on either side were doomed to fall, fighting for what they believed to be the right.

## CHAPTER X.

## WITH THE RED CROSS WORKERS.

**B**EFORE they were through breakfast the concert of big guns was in full swing.

The heavy booming sound went crashing through the canyons like the most terrific thunder ever heard. Of course in time Bob and Sid would grow more accustomed to this sort of thing, and pay much less attention to the frequent concussions. These often felt as though some unseen person had "playfully tapped their cheek with the broad side of a shingle," as one of them chanced to remark.

Sid was known to be very determined in his way—that is, once he had made up his mind he clung to his plan of campaign tenaciously, and only surrendered when hope seemed useless.

He had mentioned during the previous evening his intention of visiting the field hospital just a short distance back of the lines, for he



wished to take advantage of the opportunity to see what such a place looked like.

It was not so much curiosity that influenced Sid, for he was becoming more and more interested in surgery. Surely any one with a leaning in this direction could hardly find a better place to pick up points than an emergency hospital after a fierce battle, when the busy army surgeons are working in shifts.

Bob in order to keep his chum quiet had even promised to accompany him, though truth to tell he was not so deeply infatuated with the idea as Sid. But at least, having given his word, he would never go back on it.

"At any rate," Sid was saying about the time they were finishing their breakfast, "we won't have any trouble finding the retired place where the hospital is located. They're still fetching in some of the boys who were not found last night, or have since been lowered from the summit of the captured peak by means of long ropes."

"I rather think they refused to go to the rear and have their wounds taken care of, some of them," ventured Bob. "They're a game lot, that's all I can say. Time was when I didn't have a very great idea of Italian

bravery and grit. I used to think them a decadent Nation; but I've changed my mind since striking the shores of Italy."

"Well, I should say you ought to!" exclaimed Sid, instantly. "No soldiers on the face of the earth, not even our own fellows in khaki, could have excelled that feat we saw yesterday. It was top-notch, all wool, and a yard wide at that."

"Just look over yonder, Sid!"

"Do you mean where those two hospital assistants are coming in with a man on their stretcher, Bob?"

"Yes. Do you notice anything queer about the wounded man?" demanded the other.

Sid looked closer, and then replied:

"Why, no, I can't say that I do, except that perhaps he's wearing a different uniform from any of the other fellows around here. Yes, some one has already tied a rude sort of bandage around his leg. I reckon now, Bob, he's had first aid. But what is there strange about him?"

"Well, for one thing he's an Austrian soldier," asserted Bob.

"I declare, you're right about that!" ex-

claimed his chum, eagerly. "How silly in me not to notice that fact right away."

"And you can see that the Italian Red Cross stretcher men are treating him just as decently as if he belonged to their own side, Sid."

"Just what they are," admitted the other. "I've heard it said, but now we know it to be a fact, that no matter how fiercely men fight each other, when the battle is over, and they lie there together on the field wounded, their passions cool. In thousands of cases they are discovered helping their late foes who chance to be injured worse than themselves. Sometimes they are glad to give dying men a drink of water from their own canteens, or hold their heads up for a last look around."

"All of which is a mighty good argument against war," said Bob, impetuously. "It proves that the ordinary run of men don't hate their working brothers even of a different nation. Wars are mostly conceived and engineered by those high in power, kings and rulers, with the lust for conquest and dominion urging them on."

"Whew! you'd make a pretty good socialist, Bob," chuckled Sid.

"In that one particular I would," agreed the other, soberly, "and when Germany becomes a free republic, which many people are hoping will be the wind-up of this awful business of killing men, the whole world can turn to democracy. Then, believe me, war is going to be an unknown calamity. Free republics do not envy their neighbors their goods or land. They want to live at peace with every one."

"Then let's hope that glorious day will hurry along," Sid went on to say fervently; "but since we're through eating, Bob, suppose we follow after those Red Cross chaps, and fetch up at the field hospital."

Bob, knowing there would be little peace until his comrade had had his wish gratified, turned to Captain Antonio, who sat close by, and presented the matter to him in a few words.

The Italian officer smiled, and nodded agreeably.

"Certainly, we will go at once," he assented. "It can be easily managed; and I must say that the wish to do something to alleviate the sufferings of those poor heroes does you

both credit. Come, we will start at once, young signors."

On the way both Bob and Sid used their eyes to some advantage, though of course what they heard passing between the soldiers was almost like Greek or Choctaw to them, since neither professed to speak Italian.

"You wouldn't think these brave soldiers had been fighting most of yesterday," ventured the admiring Sid; "for they look as fresh as daisies, and ready to do their bit again to-day if called upon."

"Men get hardened to almost anything in time," explained the conductor; "doubtless in the beginning most of these same fellows shrank back appalled when they heard the first shell shriek overhead, and then felt the blast of air that accompanied its bursting. But by degrees they grew used to everything. Soldiers nearly all become fatalists, and believe they will not die until their time comes. So of what use is it to worry over what cannot be helped?"

This was a new idea to Sid, and he pondered over it as he trudged along. Indeed they seemed to be picking up fresh information every hour of the day; and should they live to

go back home again their minds promised to be regular storehouses of knowledge.

It turned out that the emergency hospital was not so very far away. Protected by overhanging craggy heights upon which their own men were located the necessary business of taking care of those who had been wounded more or less severely could be readily carried out.

"You see," observed Bob, as they made an abrupt turn, and came upon a busy scene, with doctors and attendants, every one wearing the magical red cross on his or her left arm, were working, or hurrying back and forth, "it's part of the scheme to have such a field base as near the fighting line as safety will allow. This is on account of the saving of time in getting the victims to the operating tables."

"They've managed to clear up pretty much everything by now," Sid was saying, half to himself.

Bob hardly knew whether it was relief or disappointment that made his voice seem so queer. As far as his, Bob's, feelings went he was decidedly glad that grewsome sights did not await them, for he did not have the same



eagerness as Sid to witness surgical operations.

They walked about, observing many interesting things, and watching an ambulance being loaded with some of the injured, who were doubtless to be transported to a train in waiting. In due time they would be once more on Italian territory, and safely lodged in some modern hospital, where they could begin to recover from the shock of amputation, it might be.

Much as Sid would have liked to ask questions, his lack of knowledge of the Italian tongue prevented his having this pleasure. But it did not keep either of them from nodding and smiling every time they caught the eyes of a wounded man fastened upon them curiously.

As before they were the center of considerable attention. It undoubtedly became noised about that they belonged in far distant America, and that country naturally was more talked about in many parts of Sunny Italy than any other on the face of the whole earth.

Once a man called out something in good English; and Sid eagerly turned toward him.

"I reckon now you've been across the sea,

my friend," he remarked, cordially, at which the other nodded in the affirmative, and explained:

"Me, I work in de coal mine up in de Pennsylvania, two, three a year. When my country go to war, and call for de reservists, me I haf to come, or I shall be looked on as one deserter and traitor to de colors. When it is all over, and Italia Irredenta it has been taken from de Austrians me, I go back again Americ and earn more big money. I leave my family over in de Scranton."

"I certainly hope you'll get back there before another year goes by, my brave friend," said Sid, fervently, as he shook the hand of the patriot who did not hesitate when that call to duty reached him far over the sea.

As they walked on Captain Antonio went on to say sadly:

"It distresses me to tell you, young signors, the surgeon in attendance informed me that valiant soldier does not have one chance in ten of surviving his injuries, though of course they have not yet told him. Alas! many who have been called back from their work in your country will never see it again, or the loved ones

whom they left there while they obeyed their country's summons."

This made both Bob and Sid feel sad. Unconsciously their thoughts drifted across to the mining region in Pennsylvania, where in some humble but cheery cabin home the little family of immigrants anxiously awaited news from the man of the house, who had left them there when his country called. It was one of the depressing results of war, for countless hearts must be broken in order to gratify the overweening ambition of some ruler.

After a bit Captain Antonio remembered some engagement that he had made in the main camp, and asked his charges if they believed they could find their way back again to their tent without his presence.

"Oh, that's easy enough, Captain," laughed Sid, unconsciously assuming an air of pride; "because, you see, we've learned our little lesson while serving as Scouts, and never neglect to observe everything as we go along. I warrant you now that either one of us could return with a bandage across our eyes. That's what the habit of taking notice of things does for any one. So don't bother about us. With that little document in our possession, that you

show to so many, I reckon we can go almost anywhere, and turn up smiling later on."

Captain Antonio hastened to hand over the paper, which might prove very important, should the two young Americans be questioned, owing to their lack of knowledge of the Italian tongue. All they would have to do would be to thrust that document at the sentry, and then await results after he had called an officer.

In due time Sid announced that he had fully satisfied himself with regard to the appearance of an emergency Red Cross field hospital, and was ready to go back.

"And," he went on to say as though an idea had struck him—ideas were always cropping up in Sid's active mind; sometimes they proved valuable assets, and then again turned out to be costly experiments—"why shouldn't we vary things a little and go back by some other route?"

Bob considered. His judgment told him that it would probably be the better part of wisdom to stick to the route with which they were familiar. Still they could exercise due caution, and not take any risk of being fired on by the enemy sharpshooters, perched on some neighboring peak for the purpose of pick-

ing off any who incautiously exposed their persons.

“All right, then,” he told Sid, who of course looked pleased, as he always did when his wish was granted. “We’ll choose a different route on our return. But let’s not forget that the Austrians don’t know us as Americans, and will just as quickly send a shower of lead our way as if we wore the Italian uniform.”

“I’ll keep constantly on the watch,” asserted Sid, “and we can bring some of our boasted scout tactics into play, it may be. What’s the benefit of knowing things unless you make use of the same?”

Accordingly they turned aside on starting to return to the camp where they had passed the previous night. Both of them kept on the alert, not wishing to get into any fresh trouble. Several times a sentry barred their passage with suspicious looks and then the wonderful document had to be produced, flourished under his nose, read by the non-commissioned officer whom he summoned, after which they were immediately allowed to do as they pleased.

“It’s like a magical ‘open sesame’ of the old

fairy stories," laughed Sid when this had happened for the third time. "I can imagine Ali Baba standing before the solid stone, and calling on it to open to him when he pronounced the proper words. How about turning to the right here, or to the left, Bob?"

They had come to what seemed twin canyons, not of any great size, but which would possibly lead in different directions, though undoubtedly both of them were heavily guarded further on by detachments of Italian soldiers.

Bob did not show any sign of hesitation. He knew his bearings perfectly, and at once indicated that they should turn to the right, as that passage promised to lead them to their intended destination.

The canyon was a wild looking place, with innumerable rocks strewing its narrow floor, so that in order to advance they were compelled to move from side to side. Sid was keeping a sharp lookout ahead, though it was toward a hilltop that most of his attention was directed, for he wondered whether it might not be sheltering some of the Austrian marksmen.

It was just at this time Bob came to a sud-



den halt and pointing overhead burst out laughing, as though something humorous had struck him. Sid could not but look strangely at his comrade, for it was not often that sober Bob gave way to any hysterical outbreak.

“Laugh, Sid, as if you saw something funny up there!” said Bob, in a thrilling stage whisper. “We’re in deadly danger right now, and unless we carry out a part we may be shot down. Laugh as I say; and then listen to what I’m going to tell you!”

Although a cold shiver seemed to chase up and down his spine, Sid hastened to do as he was told, though his mirth sounded silly to him, knowing as he did that fears lay back of his loud laughter.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE TUNNEL UNDER THE HILL.

**B**OB, tell me what's it all mean?"

There was a beseeching ring to Sid's quavering voice, though he managed to keep his tone very low. All the while he continued to give vent to occasional spurts of laughter, as though what he saw above struck him as exceedingly humorous indeed.

"Listen then, Sid," went on the other, cautiously, "I glimpsed several figures ahead of us, though they vanished in that black-looking crevice in the wall of the pass. They were Austrians, too, Sid, as sure as you live, and unwounded at that, as well as carrying guns!"

"Whew! then they must be hiding out, and may be in force in the bargain," said Sid, with an intake of breath.

"Keep on pointing up and laughing," urged the other, for they had come to a full stop at the time, so as to reach some sort of agreement concerning their immediate future

movements. "They are watching us all the time, I don't question. Right now half a dozen guns may be covering us, ready to send a volley if the men get an idea in their heads that they have been discovered."

"But, Bob, what ought we do?" begged the other, anxiously, because the prospect of being riddled with bullets was far from attractive to Sid. "Had we better make a turn and go back again? Once around the bend and we could run, or dodge behind some of the outlying rocks?"

"That would give the game away, because they'd know for certain we'd seen them," Bob went on to say, grimly. "There's a better way, if only we have the nerve to see it through."

"Tell me," was all his chum said.

"It is to keep right on the way we were going," Bob explained, even as he continued to point upward and laugh, so as to gain time, and by the same tactics disarm suspicion.

"But that would take us very close to the crack in the wall, and those loose rocks lying before it?" urged Sid.

"All right," came the quick retort, "but don't you see they'd feel absolutely certain we hadn't glimpsed them; and so they'd be likely

to let us pass along unmolested. Leave that part of it to me, Sid, old fellow."

"Just as you say, Bob; I'm willing to do *anything*, if only you'll tell me when to laugh, and when to sing. I take it we want to look as free from care as possible when passing by."

"You've said it, Sid. Now come along, and look everywhere but toward that crack in the side of the canyon wall. When we get close to the place we'll act as if others are following behind us. That'll make them decide not to stop us, because of the danger they would run of being seen."

"I declare, you seem to think of everything, Bob!"

The other made no reply. Just then he had other things to think of besides the pleasure of accepting compliments. A dreadful peril hovered over their heads, which could only be averted by prompt and clever action.

When the pair had arrived almost opposite the zigzag-looking cleft in the canyon wall Bob turned and waved his hand as though to some one whom he saw at the same time giving a shout, and beckoning. Falling in with the scheme, though his hotly beating heart threatened to crowd up into his throat apparently,

and choke him, Sid too beckoned and laughed. He also tried to call out, even if his voice hardly rose above a hoarse whisper, owing to his fright.

It was a new and decidedly unpleasant experience to realize that nervous fingers were possibly pressing gun-triggers, and that at any second there might be a furious volley, after which they would know nothing more. Though they were Uncle Sam's boys, and wore the honored khaki of the National Guard, Bob and Sid had not as yet been through the practical experiences of a soldier's life.

The scheme worked beautifully. There was no sudden rattle of guns, and they were allowed to walk past the hole in the wall unmolested. The skulkers there doubtless labored under the belief that their presence must be unsuspected, for neither of the Americans betrayed the least nervousness.

"Fine, Sid, keep it going!" whispered Bob, a dozen seconds later.

"I only hope they don't reconsider, and shoot us in the back!" groaned Sid, as though, like most brave fellows, he wanted to die with his face to the foe.

"It's all right, I tell you!" Bob assured

him. "We've pulled the wool over their eyes splendidly, and they're not going to fire on us. Keep your nerve half a minute longer, when we will be around that bend ahead there, and quite safe. Right now we needn't fear anything. And we can turn the tables on those chaps, remember, by telling Captain Antonio about it!"

Sid doubtless placed considerable confidence in what his chum said. Nevertheless he did not really take a decent breath until they had actually passed around the curve, and thus found themselves out of range of the hiding place of the Austrian detachment.

"Now, let's move along a bit faster; but don't run yet," warned Bob; "one of the bunch might take a notion to follow us to the bend, and look around, so that if he saw us making off at top speed he'd guess the truth, and fire after us."

Five minutes later they reached a second curve in the passage. Sid uttered a low but earnest exclamation of satisfaction.

"Oh! bully for that, Bob; there's the camp, as you can see. Yes, it's our own camp in the bargain, and I even think I could pick out the big khaki-colored tent, the one the King used



for his quarters when stopping on this front."

Both of them breathed freer. They felt they had undergone a thrilling experience which would not soon be forgotten.

"What next?" demanded Sid as they drew near the camp border.

"I'm hoping to run across our friend the Captain somewhere about here," came the ready explanation. "You see, he can understand all we say, and will be able to take the important information to where it will do the most good."

"Do you think, Bob, those Austrians can be only a little detachment that got separated from their comrades, and have been hiding there in that cleft of the rocks, hoping to escape capture?"

"It may turn out that way; and again for all we know they may be the advance corps of a big push meaning to take advantage of some secret passage under the hill so as to come out in the rear of the Italian battalion, and surprise them. The truth will only be known after an entrance has been effected."

"We must try and go along, so as to see what happens?" ventured the aspiring Sid.

"Wait and see," he was told. "They may

allow us, because of our fetching the information we do."

"There's Captain Antonio!" cried Sid, suddenly.

He waved his hand as he spoke, and Bob followed this up by beckoning in a manner that announced something of importance was in the wind. So the Captain started toward his charges, and arrived, smiling as usual.

"I see you came back safely, and by another route than the one we took in going," he remarked, as he reached them.

"Bob's made a wonderful discovery, too, which he means to tell you about, Captain," Sid blurted out, unable to hold the news back.

At that the little officer looked expectantly toward the second young American. There was need of haste, and accordingly Bob quickly told him all that had happened. He did not try to make out that they had played any heroic rôle, but simply came on past the danger spot, and had not been intercepted.

Captain Antonio at once looked grave. Evidently he did not figure it out that these lurkers were simply stragglers from the hostile army, trying to hide out until they had a chance to regain their own lines.

“Come with me, young signors,” he told them, “and repeat what you have said before the colonel commanding this section of the front. He understands English, and you can explain more fully to him. This looks serious to me, and should be investigated without delay.”

This they did gladly enough. The Colonel was a severe looking officer with heavy gray eyebrows and mustache, a veteran in the service, apparently. He listened, then asked a number of questions, and must have decided upon the plan of action, for he called out an order to a subordinate, and there was an immediate gathering of quite a large force of fighting men.

“They’re going to capture or wipe out that bunch, as sure as anything, Bob!” ventured Sid. “Why not ask the Colonel to let us go along with them?”

As this agreed with his own inclinations Bob boldly asked for the permission, and glancing inquiringly at Captain Antonio and noting the nod the commandant gave his assent immediately.

“If the Captain will accompany you to keep you out of trouble, there is no reason that

I can see why you should not have your wish gratified, young signors," he told them. "Only for your shrewdness we might not have known about those occupants of the crevice in the canyon wall until they had found time to carry out their part. It may be you have unwittingly played the rôle of saving my brave soldiers from a surprise attack that would cost us dearly. *Si*, you shall go if you wish it. Would that I could see your country's flag side by side with our own banner, and know that America, the greatest of all free nations, was enlisted for the right."

That seemed to be the heart-felt wish of nearly every one with whom Bob and Sid found a chance to talk. They were looking into the near future with great hopes, in the belief that if once America deigned to speak it would be in thunder tones heard around the whole world.

Before long the start was made, and the two young fellows noticed that a rapid-fire gun was taken along as part of the equipment, as though there were suspicions that it might be needed.

Of course they followed in the rear. Captain Antonio kept at their side, so Sid could speak to the other whenever something oc-

curred to him, or his curiosity was duly aroused.

"There must be half a hundred men in this detachment," was his first remark; "and another seems forming to follow us up, as if the Colonel meant to make a sure thing of the job. And here in behind them all we ought to be quite safe, I should think, Captain."

"It was done for a purpose," explained the guide. "If those in the dark crevice saw that you two were with the command they would understand an attack was intended, and so we might lose a golden chance to surprise them. As it is they will only believe our men are carrying out some maneuver, and so may be taken off their guard. Then it might be they would in their anger try to shoot you both; and I am made responsible for your safety with those high in command; even the King himself bade me not let you come to any harm."

"That was very kind of His Majesty," said Bob, warmly.

Indeed he had been quite favorably impressed with what little he had seen of the Italian ruler, who seemed so democratic. He was also much loved by his soldiers, among whom he often moved, chatting with one and

another as though no great class gulf yawned between their ranks in life.

They soon came close to the last bend. When this had been turned they could see the dark crevice in the canyon wall, but everything looked peaceful. Sid had a little uneasy feeling just then. He wondered whether after all sagacious Bob could have made a blunder, and only *imagined* he saw several men in Austrian uniforms.

Not for worlds would he have mentioned such a thing, lest it make his chum feel badly. Still, Sid could not help remembering that so far as himself was concerned he had actually seen and heard nothing to indicate that enemies were concealed in that passage. Not even the clicking of a gun-lock, nor a half suppressed cough had reached his listening ears as they walked past.

"So in one way," he was telling himself under his breath, "I'll be glad to hear the crack of a rifle from inside that same crooked crevice, because that'll vindicate my chum's story, anyway."

There was no further time for him to commune with himself, because the leading Italian soldiers were now even with the suspected spot.



Suddenly hoarse orders rang out, and the column, turning, dashed straight toward the jagged scar on the face of the canyon wall. The first platoon threw up their guns, and fired a volley even as they rushed to the attack.

Immediately afterwards the hollow crash of guns could be heard. The sound came from inside the crevice. Sid felt relieved. He did not like to note the fact that several soldiers were down, either wounded or killed outright; but that could not be helped, and at least they knew now this was no false alarm.

He saw those in the van dash boldly into the narrow slit in the rock, not even waiting until the torches and lanterns provided for the purpose could be lighted.

Then began an interesting as well as dangerous undertaking, as the Italians commenced to scour the several passages looking for their enemies. Lights began to flash into existence as more and more of the Italians found their way into the underground retreat of the Austrians. Bob and Sid did not mean to be left out of all this excitement. They, too, had procured lights, and while endeavoring to keep well behind the leaders, they started out to follow one of the passages.

A part of the subterranean network of tunnels seemed to be Nature's own work; but in places the artful Austrians had dug new connections. Thus they had fashioned a means for passing entirely under the hill, so as to come out in the rear of the peak taken only the day before by the bold invaders.

"We want to go slow about this business," remarked Bob, thinking it best to curb his chum's customary impetuosity in the start.

"Now what might you mean by saying that?" demanded Sid, waving his blazing torch, formed of a resinous knot of wood.

"Well, in the first place we don't want to get ahead of our own men, because they might take us for enemies, you know. Then again the Austrians are as thick as peas in these tunnels, and might capture us, something we're not hankering after either. Besides, how can we tell but what they may have mined this place down here and plan to set the magazine off when they think they can trap a lot of our boys."

Sid somehow writhed on hearing that. The idea was far from pleasant, and caused him to glance apprehensively around at the cold walls by which they were surrounded.

## CHAPTER XII.

## NOT A SECOND TO SPARE.

SEVERAL times they had heard strange booming sounds, that always gave Sid a peculiar sensation, especially after Bob had mentioned that matter about the mine possibility. Still, they understood that this must mean some sort of bombardment, where the occupants of the eccentric passages and the searching Italian soldiers chanced to come upon each other.

“One thing sure,” remarked Sid, after a third experience of this kind, “that was never a detached squad of the enemy forces, as we at one time suspected.”

“There seems to be too many around this section for them to be fugitives,” readily admitted his companion, as though he too had been making up his mind with regard to the matter; “so I reckon they must have come purposely to swing around to the rear of the Italian camp. When enough had passed through

to form a strong corps it was their intention to surprise our friends, and likely put them to flight. In that way the victory of yesterday would be rendered almost useless, because nothing worth while could come from it."

"Perhaps we'd better be turning back now, Bob?" suggested Sid; "of course not because I'm afraid at all, certainly not; but then there's nothing to see around here. If we just keep on working our way along, why, the chances are we'll break out somewhere, and find ourselves looking into a whole army of foes."

"Are you sure you've had enough of this wandering around in crooked tunnels?" demanded Bob, himself quite ready to call the affair off.

"Why, I don't see any use of keeping it up regardless of time and distance, Bob. Both of us would feel better taking things easy in our tent. Suppose we right-about face and retrace our steps?"

"In a minute or so we will, Sid. I just happened to glimpse some sort of light pass a hole in the wall ahead of us yonder, and I'm curious enough to want to look through, and see who's who."

He led the way along, Sid following in a

sort of indifferent way, as though it was already settled in his mind how at the most they would find some of the Italian forces in the adjoining passage, looking like themselves for an excuse to give up the search, which was not turning out especially profitable.

There seemed to be some sort of thin shell of rock lying between, and this in places had small apertures in it, through one of which Bob must have caught the glimmer of the other light.

Almost carelessly the two bent and glued their eyes to the friendly opening, to be immediately given a most tremendous start. What they discovered was entirely different from anything they had expected to see.

Several men were in sight. They wore the uniform of the Austrian forces, much the worse for wear and hard usage. Already the enormous expense of the great war was apparently making such serious inroads in the Austrian Government purse that needful supplies could not always be furnished the troops in the field; and yet before the outbreak of hostilities the army of Francis Joseph had always been noted for its spectacular appearance and fine uniforms.

But neither of the young Americans bothered in the least concerning the attire of the men they were watching. It was more what the others were doing that interested both Bob and Sid. The latter gripped his chum's arm savagely as he whispered in Bob's ear:

"Oh! notice the sparks, will you, Bob? Now the men are getting out in a hurry, and say, don't you see what they've gone and done—left a slow-match spluttering like a serpent there? It's going to set some sort of horrible magazine to bursting, Bob; and in that way smash the network of tunnels here! Let's climb out of this like hot cakes, boy!"

"Hold on!" snapped Bob, with all his accustomed energy; at the same time taking a fresh grip on his companion's arm.

"But don't you see, Bob, they've applied the match to the fuse, which is already burning and sizzling and eating its way right along. There may be a whole ton of explosives in some hidden part of these caverns, meant to blow everything sky high. I haven't any lofty notions, Bob; for one I'm satisfied to remain on this old earth just as I happen to be situated. We'll have time to make off, I reckon, if we hurry."



“But it might be some others wouldn’t be just as lucky, and if the old fireworks should get a start it’d bring down heaps and heaps of rocks on their heads, not to mention blocking up the passages so they’d be trapped like rats. We ought to try and put that slow-match out, Sid.”

“Tell me how we can do such a thing, and I’ll lend a helping hand, sure I will, Bob.”

If daylight could only have been suddenly brought to bear upon the face of the speaker perhaps it might be found that there was an utter absence of color in his features. The sudden alarm had given him more or less of a shock, which would explain his pallor. It was not exactly fear, but rather a sudden apprehension with regard to what would happen to them should that mine be discharged while they were still within a certain radius.

All the same Sid made no attempt to run away. He was bound to stand or fall with the chum, upon whom he always placed such dependence. What Bob said would be the best course for them to pursue, beyond a shadow of a doubt. And so Sid, holding his very breath with mingled eagerness and dismay, stood there waiting on Bob.

"Let's try and break through this wall," suggested the other, hurriedly.

Sid gave the object in question a savage kick. He loosened some of the trap-rock which fell with a clatter.

"Why, it seems to break in pieces, Bob!" cried Sid, commencing to get busy again.

"If we smashed our way through," declared the other, rapturously, "we could make that spluttering fuse look sick in a hurry. Now, buck the line hard again, Sid. Pretend it's a football squad opposed to us, that we've just got to knock down so as to get the ball in our hands. Altogether now, with a push!"

Under the impact of their combined pressure some more particles of the rock fell. But as yet they had not managed to make much of an impression on the whole structure.

Again did Bob stare through the aperture, and Sid with him. They could see that hissing line of sparks crawling steadily along over the stone. It seemed like some insensate monster glorying in its capacity for doing terrible damage when the proper moment came around.

"Oh! it's just *racing* along, don't you see, Bob!" gasped Sid. "Already it seems one-third shorter than to begin with."

"Fully that!" said his companion coolly.

Bob was meanwhile struggling with a portion of the rocky wall, which he was apparently detaching in separate fragments. Doubtless he was possessed of an idea that could they only sufficiently weaken the structure it might yet be possible to break through.

"Hadn't we better run for it?" continued Sid, swallowing any foolish fears of ridicule he may at first have entertained.

"No, it would be more dangerous to be caught running than staying here and trying to stamp the danger out. We might be trapped in a passage without any exit, and no one could come to help us. We must fight it out here, and in the way we're doing. It's the only thing left to us. Break through any old way, Sid. Get busy, and do your level best, boy! Go to it!"

Being wildly excited by now Sid proceeded to attack the intervening shell of a wall. He tore and kicked and pounded like a madman. Every fragment, however small, that could be detached from the whole wall might count as so much gained. Bob too was working heroically, so that all the while they were rendering the barrier less impregnable. Given a certain

amount of time and they were sure to demolish it sufficiently to engage a passage.

The only uncertainty lay in that question concerning the length of time that bustling, hissing fuse would occupy in making its run. It looked like a fiery serpent to Sid, and he would always remember it as such.

Sid could even mentally picture the dreadful consequences of the threatened explosion. He imagined he saw the massive walls supporting the arch overhead toppling, just as the temple did in those olden days when Samson, blinded through treachery on the part of one he trusted, sought successfully to encompass the destruction of all his most bitter foes when bringing about his own death.

It was too bad if they were fated to die there in that dreadful manner, because their fate must always be shrouded in deepest mystery for those in the homeland. But if he did give way more or less to such dismal forebodings Sid was not the one to surrender until the last call had come. He worked harder than ever to overcome the obstacles that stood in their way.

Sid gave a sudden shrill shriek that contained all the elements of rejoicing. He had

seen Bob smash his way through the offensive wall, having been given a remarkable increase of muscular power, perhaps through sheer desperation.

Close upon the heels of his chum dashed Sid, but one thought uppermost in his brain just then. Whatever happened to Bob must come to him also, for they had always been inseparable. If the fuse had burned to its limit, and the mine must explode, well, they would pass out of this world together, that was all.

Swift as a swallow on the wing did Bob dart forward. If he had had pinions himself he could hardly have made faster time. Life and death hung in the balance, and it was no moment for faltering.

Following on his comrade's heels Sid held his breath in awe. He could see Bob eagerly stamping upon the still sputtering, sparkling train of fire. How stubbornly it did hold out to be sure, just as though, having come so far, it absolutely refused submission.

Now the sparks diminished in number and savage venom. They had lost their vigor, and unless some accident occurred it looked as though Bob had won his victory. Loud cries came pealing along the passage, and men could

be heard rushing toward them. At first Sid could not decide whether these new-comers were friends or foes. He did suspect though that they might be some of the more advanced Italians, who, discovering the peril they were in, in desperation had attempted to reach the burning fuse in time. But if this were indeed so they would have been much too late to have kept the slow-match from gaining a union with the hidden magazine.

Sid almost dropped on his hands and knees when he actually realized that Bob had mastered the threatening danger. It was now all a thing of the past, something to be told later on with a little hysterical laugh, but no longer threatening their safety.

Leaning against the side wall he turned and looked in the direction of those who were hurrying to the spot, awed by their recent narrow escape. Sid could now see by their uniforms and other things that they were indeed some of the Italian soldiers who had been searching the caverns and tunnels under the hill. Somehow the fact gave him considerable pleasure, for he could not view a possible encounter with a hostile group of armed foes with any degree of satisfaction.



The men now came up. They found the two young Americans standing there, Bob still with a heel pressing on the tip-end of the lately burning fuse. The scene was too patent to be easily misunderstood. Those soldiers realized that perhaps they owed their lives to the energy and promptness of those young fellows. Only for Bob managing to smash through the rock barrier the explosion must have taken place on schedule time, with more or less serious results.

One of the soldiers could speak English, it happened, and the others pushed this fellow to the front to voice their feelings of gratitude on account of what Bob had done for them all.

Sid still felt his nerves quivering. A weakness had also developed around the region of his knees. Strangely enough, these parts of his anatomy seemed disposed to knock together, something Sid had never before known to happen to him. All of which showed what a shock the recent trial had been, with that sparkling fuse running a race with death, and only Bob's swiftness of foot to interpose.

Now that the last of the Austrians had been chased from the series of subterranean passages, there was a fair chance that the Italians

might turn the tables on the enemy. When Bob and Sid emerged once more, and saw the welcome light of that Spring morning, they discovered that more troops were coming on the run.

"I reckon now," ventured Sid, without hesitation, "that the general in command has been put in possession of the facts about these tunnels leading under the big hill, and means to try and utilize them so as to take the enemy by surprise."

"Why not?" sang out Bob; "what's sauce for the goose ought to be sauce for the gander, they say. You notice how quick these Italians are to take advantage of every piece of knowledge that comes to their attention. It may have seemed a grand thing for the Austrians to plan this wonderful trap; but it bids fair to recoil on their own heads."

"Partly owing to the fact that a fellow I know happened first of all to glimpse some of the hidden force. Then he led our friends the Italians to the crevice in the canyon wall. Afterwards he even prevented the explosion from wrecking the whole business."

"Enough of that sort of talk, Sid, please. I was saving my own life, and yours as well,

when I made that champion break through the wall, and got my foot on the old fuse. Yes, it was a pretty close shave all right. I own up that my heart is still beating about twice as fast as it usually does; and my hand would turn out far from being steady under a test. But it's some pleasure to know that things are breaking well for us. Suppose we go back to the camp again, and rest up a bit?"

"I'm agreeable," said Sid, without any hesitation, "because, to tell you the honest truth, I feel played out. If I'd been doing a full day's work I couldn't be more tired."

So they walked along until they reached the region of the army tents. There was considerable commotion noticeable, and it was easy to guess that certain movements might be in progress looking to another attack upon some hostile stronghold that stood between the invaders and their goal of Gorizia and Trieste.

Later on, as the hour drew along toward the middle of the day, Captain Antonio made his appearance. He told them they were both in high favor at Headquarters, where the story of their recent exploits had been the subject of considerable enthusiastic exchange of opinion.

“And every officer is saying that more than ever do they believe if America will only conclude later on to come in with the Allies, the finish of Prussianism is as certain as that the sun will rise tomorrow. They also say that the two young signors are true representatives of the free people across the sea. They love you both.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE TRENCHES IN THE SOLID ROCK.

SID had actually taken things easy during the balance of that morning, considerably to the amusement of his comrade. Perhaps their strenuous adventure in the underground retreat of the Austrians had made Sid feel as though he needed something of a rest.

It could not endure, of that Bob felt positive; and sure enough, hardly had they finished their simple noon meal than Sid made a proposition.

“How long do we stay around here, Bob?” he asked.

“That depends on how we feel about it,” the other told him. “We can please ourselves, according to what Captain Antonio says. From what I can pick up it seems that the Minister of Marine, or Secretary of the Navy, as we’d call him over in America, will be back in Rome inside of three days. He gave us to understand that he would be pleased to see us

any time after that, and settle the matter of the Fairbanks aerial torpedo in a way he felt certain would be satisfactory to all parties concerned."

"H'm, that allows us considerable latitude, doesn't it?" mused Sid. "If we wanted to see the whole show we might hang out here the entire three days. There are heaps of matters I want to look into while I have the chance, you know, Bob?"

"Sure thing," chuckled the other; "shall we begin to move around again in the morning?"

"And loaf all this beautiful afternoon?" ejaculated Sid, looking dismayed. "Why, I'd like to commence right away, if you didn't object seriously."

"What have you got on the string first of all?" asked his mate, knowing that he might as well give in first as last, if he wanted any peace in the camp, for Sid was a most persistent fellow, once he started.

"Well, there are the trenches for one thing, Bob."

"Why, yes, we did say we wanted to look closer into the same, and see how they were constructed. Here in this rock-bound country



it's a different thing to build trenches from the flat country of Belgium, Northern France and other fronts in Russia or Galicia."

"So we've been told," Sid agreed. "There they dig down, and line the trench with concrete; but here they have to blast holes in the rocks, and do a lot of actual quarrying, because the whole country is a solid mass of stone."

"One other thing we've been told, which is that the accommodating Austrians have so far done most of the hardest work," chuckled Bob. "They spend months digging and blasting and making cross-trenches. Then General Cadorna orders a spirited advance, the Italians drive forward a few miles, and occupy the trenches the enemy constructed at so much time and expense. That's what I call a shrewd game—getting your enemy to do the work for you."

"But how do they manage when the trenches have been built to front one way?" asked Sid, curiously.

"Oh! I understand they have a regular set plan for doing that," Bob informed him. "It's called consolidating their newly won positions, and consists for the most part in turning the

trenches around so as to front the other way. If this can be carried out speedily the new occupants can the more easily meet the counter attack that is sure to be organized as soon as reinforcements arrive for the detachments lately ejected. But we can understand all those things better after we've had a chance to investigate."

"Then you'll agree to start right away, I hope, Bob?"

"I suppose there'll be no peace till we do, Sid, so let's be off."

He caught the eye of Captain Antonio, and beckoned him over. The latter readily agreed to the proposition advanced by Bob, and presently they were on their way.

"Fortunately just at the present time there seems to be a lull in the firing, and it offers us the opportunity we seek," the officer told them. "If the bombardment of the trench line was in full swing I could not think of taking you out there, as the risk of meeting death would be too great. On the way I may be able to show you a few things that will interest you, more or less."

"Then please tell us what that queer looking object is over there, Captain," and Sid

pointed as he spoke. "I've been keeping an eye on the same for an hour and more, but don't seem able to make head or tail of it. Sometimes I think it must be a sort of grain reaper of a new and clumsy type, something to be run like an automobile. Then I notice that there's some object mighty similar to a rapid-fire gun poking out from its front. So begin by telling us what it really is."

Bob broke in before the captain could speak.

"Oh! if you'd asked me I could have put you wise, Sid," he was saying. "I imagine that must be one of those queer tractors that they call 'tanks' or moving forts. They've been using them to great advantage on the British front, you know, lately. They lay their own rails as they wheel on, pass over trenches, straddle ditches, and cut a swathe through the ranks of the enemy. In fact they're the modern war chariot—you know the ancient Romans used to have keen knives fastened to their wheels, and driving furiously through the opposing force cut them down like grain."

"Could we examine it, do you think, Captain?" Sid asked eagerly.

"I will ask permission of the officer who

is standing close by, and I hardly think there will be any objection," came the reply. "There is no great secret about the machine, but they are saying the British have done grand work with them. The Germans couldn't find any way to get at the few men inside who were working the machine guns all the while. In fact, the tanks had considerable to do with the success of the last drive in Northern France."

"But how can you make use of one in such rocky and mountainous country as this around here?" Bob now asked.

"It has been sent here to experiment with when we reach a level plateau later on," the captain explained. "You see, we have to look ahead, and prepare for the future. Please wait here until I have talked with the lieutenant."

It turned out that there could be no objection to the young Americans taking a closer look at the queer contrivance becoming known as a "tank." Of course it was of clumsy build, not at all so cleverly arranged as later editions; but Sid found much to interest him in connection with the machine.

Then they moved along, and from time to time the captain was kept busy answering further queries, mostly fired at him by Sid, who

"wanted to know" almost as constantly as though he had been born in Missouri.

In order to reach the nearest trenches they had to cross a level terrain where there were many evidences of the destructive rain of heavy shells that had accompanied the last bombardment. Of course these did not dig great gaps in the plateau as would have been the case had it been earth instead of rock; but in scores of places the observers could discover the frightful effect produced when one of the enormous missiles from the Austrian howitzers burst.

"Whew! I'd have hated to be right here when all that shooting was going on," admitted Sid, as they made their way between two places where the stone was shattered and splintered in a most astonishing fashion. "I reckon a fellow wouldn't have much chance to pull out alive and whole with all that mass of stuff flying through the air around him."

"Let's hope then," added discreet Bob, "that the Austrian gunners will kindly refrain from sending any of their spare shells this way while we're on the job."

"Why, you don't think they'd go to all that bother and expense, just because they glimpsed

three lone figures moving across here, do you?" asked Sid, uneasily.

"Hardly, when each of those big shells costs a small fortune, not to speak of the wear and tear on the mortars. They say those monster guns can only be discharged so many times, and then have to be bored afresh, such is the destructive force of the loads they use in them."

It appeared as though the Austrians were disposed to pay no attention to the presence of such a small detachment of the enemy. Not a single shot of any kind was fired as they crossed the open stretch. In fact it was singularly quiet, and Bob noticed that Captain Antonio seemed uneasy concerning this fact.

"Do you suppose they've fallen back, and abandoned their other trenches, Captain?" he asked, seeking information of a practical nature.

"Not at all, young signor," came the prompt reply. "With the glass you can see that they are at their posts. I was only wondering whether it might not be possible that they are making ready for a most furious cannonading to prepare for the next attack of the infantry. If that should be the case you



understand it would become so dangerous here that no man dare show his head above the rim of the trenches lest he be struck."

"Which I take it means that if we should have the hard luck to be caught out in the exposed trenches by such a hot fire we would have to stay there through it all, or till night came, at any rate?" observed Bob.

The captain shrugged his shoulders in an expressive fashion.

"I trust that may not happen, since it would be a most terrible experience for those who have never been through a bombardment before. But after all it may be the Austrians find themselves short of ammunition, and are conserving their supplies of shells lest we make another assault on their lines. Let us hope so at least. But here we are at the trenches, young signors, and you shall see all you wish."

They were soon down below the surface of the ground and fraternizing with the Italian soldiers whom they found there. Some were on duty, others taking it easy, sleeping, smoking, or chatting in a voluble way. Of course as soon as they learned that the young fellows were from America they one and all took the greatest interest in them, and could not do

enough to show how they appreciated their coming. It may have seemed like an augury of better days to those poor tired fellows, who had shivered through the winter just passed. Many of them unaccustomed to the icy blasts that tore through those mountainous regions, having come from the warm plains of Southern Italy, it was possible.

Sid examined the formation of the wonderful rock trenches to his heart's content. He saw how cleverly they were constructed so as to afford communication between the numerous angles and wings. There was a connecting line intended to allow the Austrians to pass back in case of necessity; but so far no opportunity had been afforded the Italians to carry out the same device, since they came into possession of the zigzag lines at the front.

This was what the captain had meant when saying that if a severe bombardment broke out those caught in the trenches would have to cower there, and stand it the best they could, since retreat would be utterly impossible.

All sorts of devices were found calculated to make things a bit more comfortable for the poor fellows who must man these long holes in the rocks when the enemy drew near. Some

of these amused Sid very much, while others caused him to have a queer feeling in the region of his heart. He could not but pity the chaps who were forced to descend to such devices in order to make life a little more endurable.

Bob once or twice stood on some raised platform to try and imagine how it must feel to be a defender of these strange modern trenches. He even handled one of the quick-firing guns which could be seen at stated intervals, and were intended to decimate any advancing lines of the enemy.

Looking back he could plainly mark the ridges where he knew the heavy Italian guns were located, though of course there would be some others whose disposition had been kept secret until the time came for them to surprise the enemy.

Then Bob looked forward. The lofty peaks and the second line of ridges that were to be the next object of the persistent Italian attacks lay in plain sight, though Bob, accustomed to judging distances, guessed they were some miles distant.

All seemed peaceful in that quarter, and it was difficult to believe that ten thousand, per-

haps many times that number, of men, as well as scores upon scores of monster guns, or smaller field batteries, were hidden from sight. From what Bob had seen and heard he doubted whether any sign of those howitzers could be detected even through the most powerful glass. As a rule they lie far behind the front, hidden under deceptive camouflage coverings, so that observers in hovering airplanes may not find out the locations and signal to their own batteries.

Bob had already seen all he wanted of the trenches. He wished Sid would get his fill and signify his intention of returning to the camp behind the hill. The longer they stayed there the more danger there was of something happening to bring fresh trouble down upon their heads.

So when finally about the middle of the afternoon Sid turned around and announced that he believed he had seen all there was of trench life, Bob felt relieved. Given half an hour in which to cross the plateau and all would be well.

Bob fully expected that Captain Antonio would at once start out on the return trip. He became concerned when he noticed that

the officer was making use of his binoculars, and that the object of his attention was the height where it was known the Austrian batteries lay concealed from view. Then he would lower his glasses so as to take in the ground at the base of the heights. Here the several corps of infantry no doubt lay in waiting, biding their time for a fierce drive upon the enemy after a concerted bombardment from all the guns, big and small, had caused the Italian forces to cower in their trenches.

"Is there any sign of trouble, Captain?" asked Bob, guessing the reason for the officer's plain concern.

"I am sorry to say something is brewing, and that the storm may break upon us at any moment," came the staggering reply, that made Sid open his eyes and look alarmed.

It was one thing to imagine what such a terrible event might seem like, and quite another to go through with the experience. Even Bob felt a sinking sensation about the region of his heart as he stared off toward those slumbering ridges, and tried to picture what it would seem like when they were all aflame with the discharges of monster cannon, while the earth rocked under the awful blast.

He was about to ask whether there might not be still time for them to make a hasty retreat when he saw the Captain throw up a warning hand.

“Quick! get down where you will be safer, young signors; or at least fasten a steel shrapnel-proof helmet on your heads, each of you; for it is coming. See, all along the line of trenches the men are springing to their posts. It is one fortunate thing for us, I am telling you, that we did not start out upon the open a little while back, for the chances are ten to one we never would have reached the camp. There, what did I tell you, young signors; that was meant for the signal for the mad war dance to begin? Now you will see and hear something worth your while!”



## CHAPTER XIV.

## SHUT IN BY THE BARRAGE FIRE.

O H! Bob, I'm to blame for our staying so long!" exclaimed Sid, doubtless conscience stricken.

Bob only put out a hand, and patted his chum on the shoulder. Indeed, had he wanted to say anything he would have found it utterly impossible just then, for it seemed as though the whole earth was trembling under the mighty discharge of uncounted monster guns. A burst of smoke was seen to roll up all along the distant ridge as, in obedience to the signal, every Austrian gunner sent his compliments toward the Italian lines.

All of the aiming had been carried out through range finders in a strictly mechanical way. By the system of charts which they possessed those engineers and gunners could place a shell upon any one of the various squares marked for their guidance on the map.

Captain Antonio dragged his two compan-

ions down beside him. He knew how dangerous it was to remain in any exposed position. As those missiles of destruction burst with crashing detonations they were bound to do a vast amount of destruction in every direction. Men would receive wounds, and it might be meet their death while at their more or less exposed stations.

They crouched where they were. It was impossible to do any sort of talking while all that frightful row was going on. If communications were absolutely necessary the defenders of the trenches had a system of signals by means of which orders had to be given.

At least Sid must be quite satisfied now. He was seeing and hearing one of the wonders of the twentieth century, a chorus of the mightiest guns conceived by the ingenuity of man. Both boys knew that the Austrians have long been famous as the makers of such monster weapons that even the "big Berthas" of the Krupp works in Germany cannot compare with them in size.

Awed by the din the two young Americans remained crouching there for some little time, content to simply know they were escaping

the storm of metal that must be filling the air above and around them.

Bob had read how sometimes this sort of work went on for hours, even days at a time, on the French front, where it was desired to smash the concrete trenches to ruins before an attack was ordered. He marveled more than ever how human nature could ever stand such frightful things; he felt that it would drive him wild to endure it for a few hours.

Then after some time passed, and they had become a little more accustomed to the mad clamor, Sid edged up a little, desirous of seeing what it looked like out there on the plateau. He knew he was taking big chances, but the temptation proved too strong to be resisted.

Bob also felt inclined to have a peep. He believed he could impress the picture on his mind so that it would never be forgotten.

It was a most amazing scene that greeted the eyes of the chums as they peered over the edge of the rocky trenches taken from the Austrians in one of those wild and impetuous sweeps of the invading army.

The whole air seemed filled with a mixture of acrid smoke and flying splinters of rock and metal, as well as dust caused by the explo-

sion of the shells against the solid stone. When the passing wind carried some of this aside so that an avenue opened up, through which vista they could glimpse the distant mountains, they found that each had apparently become a volcano, sending out vast quantities of smoke with each successive shock.

One look was enough, even for the curious Sid. He fairly held his breath with awe as he stared at the appalling spectacle. Had the end of the world really come things could hardly have assumed a more terrible aspect.

So, greatly to the relief of the anxious captain, they consented to drop back once more to a more secure retreat. It was dangerous enough at the best for any of those who manned the trenches; but there they must continue to hide. They were waiting for the hour to strike, when the infantry masses would be sent against them, the barrage of fire from the combined batteries being lifted at the same minute, and covering the ground back of the trench line so that the defenders could not escape from their doom.

It was not long before Sid discovered that one of the soldiers close by had received a wound. Some of his immediate comrades were

trying to look after him in their crude fashion. He seemed to be quite seriously injured, and the chances were unless the flow of blood could be stopped, or at least greatly diminished without delay, he would lose his life.

At once the old spirit was aroused in Sid. He was taken back to former days when as a scout he had practiced all the useful things along the line of "first aid to the injured." Here was a practical opportunity to show whether his lessons had been well learned.

When Bob saw him creeping away he was at first somewhat alarmed, fearing that some mad scheme might have appealed to Sid, always more or less inclined to be a bit reckless. Looking beyond, however, Bob discovered the little group about the wounded man, and then he knew what Sid meant to do.

As his own feelings ran in the same groove Bob lost no time in starting after his chum. Two would be better than one when it came to stanching that bleeding wound; and besides, such a task would give them something useful to do, as well as take their minds off the frightful peril surrounding them.

Of course at any minute they might themselves be stricken, even as that poor fellow

lying there was, but they must take such chances.

When they understood that these young Americans knew something about surgery the men who were trying in their clumsy fashion to be of assistance to their comrade fell back, and returned to their places, each having his particular assignment in the general plan.

By now Sid and Bob were growing more or less accustomed to sights such as the wounded man presented lying there. He had a jagged wound in his arm, where the fragment of metal, impelled by tremendous force as the shell exploded, had struck him. They went about their self-imposed task with such ability that Captain Antonio was both pleased and surprised. More than ever did the little Italian officer feel warmly drawn toward these two bright young fellows from over the sea, especially when he saw them doing such clever things, and for one of his countrymen too.

By the time they had stopped the flow of blood and bound the man's injuries so that he had a very good chance of surviving, there was another call upon their services. Neither of them felt they could decline the duties that had been so unexpectedly thrust upon them. And



it made Sid have a genuine thrill of pride when one soldier actually addressed him as "Doctor."

Talking was utterly at a discount. So long as that chorus of awful rending noises continued the human voice could not compete with the accumulation of sounds.

Bob was trying to figure out what the end would be. It was a habit with him to look ahead of the present. So long as that rain of missiles was falling all around they dared not make any attempt at withdrawing. It looked very much as if they had walked into a trap when they picked out this particular afternoon for paying a visit to the advanced trenches.

Well, what then? Suppose the Austrian batteries kept up their work for hours, so that no relief could come to the soldiers cowering there, no fresh supplies, no water to quench their thirst? And then, just as quickly as the fire lifted they must anticipate the attack of the long lines of hostile infantry lying there only waiting for their hour to strike.

It was not a pleasant outlook for the two young Americans. Bob had not dreamed of anything like this when he consented to accom-

pany his chum forward, so that his curiosity could be satisfied. But what was done could not be undone. They would of course have to make the best of their bargain, and hope things might not turn out so badly after all.

That was a very long afternoon for Sid and Bob, the longest they could ever remember passing through. They had more than one narrow escape from serious injury. Indeed, Sid could point to a red mark on his left arm where a splinter of shell must have passed by, cutting a clean hole in the sleeve of his coat. He felt exceedingly thankful when he discovered later on just what a "close shave" he had had; and Bob shivered when his attention was called to the path of the flying missile that had spared Sid so considerably.

The sun was heading far down in the western heavens now. Would that terrible bombardment cease with the coming of darkness? Perhaps the Austrians meant to keep it up all through the long night, until they had set the besieged defenders of the lost trenches almost crazy for lack of sleep?

Once again had the chums ventured to peep out from their shelter. There was a metal covering over their heads, a sort of shield cap-

able of shedding most kinds of flying missiles; though only a small fraction of the extended lines of trenches were thus protected. Perhaps it had been here the Austrian officers in charge of the defense had hovered; at least Captain Antonio afterwards told them something to this effect.

The plateau looked like a section of country devastated by a hurricane. Scrub trees had been twisted, and torn from their roots, rocks shattered, and spread in masses over the ghastly landscape. Constantly fresh shells came roaring through the air, to burst with deafening sounds, adding to the general destruction.

It was like a nightmare dream, Sid thought. Never in his wildest moments had he ever imagined anything one-half so terrible. Surely the world must have gone mad, to have allowed this monster war to escape from the confinement in which he had long been caged. It must be the climax, the very utmost horror of which human nature was capable. After this riot was over the Nations of the earth would see to it that no great war ever happened again. Life would not be worth living under such horrible conditions, Bob thought, as, sick at heart,

he once more allowed the anxious Captain Antonio to help him back to comparative safety.

And so the afternoon drew near its close. No doubt upon the heights where the Italian guns lay, many an eager eye remained glued to the binoculars, as the general and his staff watched the progress of all this shattering fire, and figured concerning the time when *their* turn would come.

Down in certain protected places lay masses of men who could be relied on to go forward impetuously when they were given the order. The trenches though must be held mostly through the efforts of those now enduring the bombardment, they and their machine guns, aided by the batteries.

Even Sid was ready to declare that he had seen quite enough by now. How welcome the quiet of the camp would appear to them after all this commotion. Alas, it might just as well have been a thousand miles away as separated by that falling meteoric shower of shells and shrapnel.

It had somehow or other been arranged between them that they would take immediate flight should there be any temporary cessation to the deluge of missiles. Just how they man-

aged to pass this scheme along it often puzzled Bob afterwards to understand.

Perhaps when the mode of attack changed, and there came a chance for intensive fighting face to face, those cowering soldiers would be glad. Anything was preferable to this inactivity, all the while exposed to deadly danger, without an opportunity to strike a blow in return.

The two chums watched the night close in. With its coming the scene took on an added terror, for the angry flashing of lights accompanying each exploding shell was not unlike the dazzling glare of so many lightning bolts shooting down from hovering storm clouds.

Some of the shells fired were of an illuminating star type. These had their mission, which was to render the terrain back of the trenches so thoroughly lighted up that the presence of any body of troops might be plainly discovered. Thus the Italian forces would be unable to send help to those who were trapped in the zone of bombardment.

Captain Antonio, upon being appealed to by Sid, now growing actually hungry, gave them to understand that according to his mind the attack could not be very long delayed. Per-

haps certain signs told him this; but Bob also noticed that there seemed to be some sort of movement along the entire line of trenches, as though the inmates sensed what was imminent.

Bob decided that the shells were falling further in the rear now. This seemed to indicate that the Austrian fire was being "lifted." Such an occurrence always presages a drive on the part of the infantry, as he well knew. Really, Bob felt that he was getting the finest possible experience along the line of modern warfare. The way things were going on he found himself imbibing knowledge of a nature which few if any others of Uncle Sam's army boys could boast. Why, most of them had never even heard the roar of a twenty-centimetre gun, let alone such a frightful outburst of sound from a myriad of monster batteries of up-to-date manufacture.

It was now fully dark, though one would have a hard time believing that, such was the angry glow everywhere about. Yes, Bob himself could tell that the shells no longer burst close by, but were venting their fury hundreds of yards in the rear of the trench line.

He felt thrilled at the thought of the serried lines of grim Austrian soldiers no doubt



at that very moment starting forth from their shelter, and beginning to make their way across the terrain. Their progress might be fairly good until they arrived at the outermost edge of the territory that had been ripped and torn by the avalanche of shells; here they would find the footing bad indeed, and many of them were bound to be thrown headlong to the ground as they staggered into the ruts and craters dug in some softer spots when the great spheres burst.

Yes, the men were manning their designated places along the lines. They knew full well what was coming. Their hearts steeled to the task, they grimly waited for the order that would loosen the many quick-firers, and send a hailstorm of metal into the ranks of the oncoming foe. If in spite of all they could do the enemy still persisted in coming on, then it would be that those in the trenches must clamber out, and go to their work with the cold steel, meeting the oncoming Austrians with the bayonet.

## CHAPTER XV.

## THE BATTLE FOR THE TRENCHES.

SECONDS were like minutes just then, and the latter took on the form of hours, such was the strain upon their nervous systems. It would not have been quite so bad could Bob and Sid have spoken together; but so overpowering was the mighty chorus of roaring guns and bursting shells that this was rendered a physical impossibility, that is with any degree of comfort.

Once or twice Sid in sheer desperation did manage to get his lips close up to the ear of his companion. By shouting at the top of his voice he could make him understand, but there was really no encouragement for conversation.

Captain Antonio was very much concerned, more on account of his charges than because of any peril that hung over his own head. He was a seasoned soldier, who had won his spurs, so to speak, in many a previous battle; so that the possibility of being stricken down did not

appal him. But these two bright young fellows from the free land across the sea had been placed in his charge for safe keeping. He felt that he was responsible for their getting back again to the camp.

How this might be done was the question to be solved. To try and pass through that hot barrage fire was next door to suicidal, unless it slackened considerably in its fury. This was the one forlorn hope the officer hugged to his heart. Hence he watched, and listened, and tried to anticipate what the Austrian gunners would do.

Now the chums were straining their eyes in the endeavor to discover the first definite sign of the oncoming long lines of hostile soldiers. Knowing what arrangements had been made to give them a warm reception, they could not help feeling sorry for the poor fellows advancing thus to their doom.

Other eyes by the hundred and thousand pairs were also strained in the same cause. Men clutched their guns, and waited grimly. Others handled quick-firers with the affection shown to pets, and could hardly wait for the word to begin operations,

Then Sid felt a hot flush suddenly pass over

him. He believed he could see some sort of action away off yonder, as the star bombs above lighted up the terrain. Yes, undoubtedly it was a movement that stretched out to the right and to the left. A great double line of men was coming swiftly forward; the enemy had already covered most of the ground separating them from the trenches they meant to try and retake.

Still the guns hammered on, and the projectiles continued to drop in mathematical order. They were sent so as to cover the whole rear, and make any attempted retreat next door to an utter impossibility.

It was appalling to watch the coming of that wavering yet ever advancing line, so soon to be shattered with a hailstorm of metal, with great gaps torn in its formation.

Still closer it came. Surely the thrilling climax could not long be delayed. Sid felt as though he must give vent to a yell, his emotions were keyed up to such a pitch.

Then the first quick-firing machine-gun in the trenches started barking in its shrill staccato fashion, though barely heard amidst the vast confusion. It was the anticipated signal for which so many had been waiting. Old Put

at the battle of Bunker Hill told his men to hold their fire until they could see the whites of the enemy's eyes. So on this occasion the one in command refused to give the order until the enemy had reached a certain point within easy reach of the rifles.

Another "pepperbox" took up the refrain close by. Then a third chimed in. To Sid it was like the volleying inside an enormous corn-popper held close over the red embers of a hard-coal fire. In this case, however, each quick report meant that another missile, perhaps pointed with death, had been sent on its mission.

Soon along the whole line of trenches there was a spluttering flame running madly. Tiny jets of fire leaped forth in quick succession as though so many miniature volcano craters might be in eruption.

Sid, again straining his overtaxed eyes, looked toward that long line of oncoming Austrians. He had no difficulty in seeing them now, for the light had grown much stronger; besides, they were closer than before.

He shivered as though a cold hand had suddenly been placed upon his heart. Why, he could see men toppling over like ripe grain

before the scythe of the reaper, or even a modern mowing-machine. The tornado of missiles that swept through their serried ranks was cutting broad swathes. True enough, under the order shrieked by their officers the staggering men were closing up these gaps as fast as they could, but it was terrible to see how quickly fresh openings began to appear.

How long could human nature stand such cruel gruelling, Sid wondered, as he crouched there at the edge of the stone trench? Still he kept his horrified eyes glued upon that dreadful though strangely fascinating scene of the night battle.

Now the advancing Austrians also opened fire. Captain Antonio, quick to sense the new danger to his charges, instantly dragged both of them down, though Sid showed extreme reluctance in obeying the mandate.

It was not all one-sided from that minute. Those Austrians were no cowards, Sid was ready to declare. They gave as well as received wounds while still continuing to press gallantly forward.

The advantage was all on the side of the Italians, however. They had the benefit of their stone trenches, and besides could make



use of scores of those deadly rapid-fire guns, each of which was equal to dozens of men armed with rifles.

It could not last long, that was certain. Sid calculated that at the rate he had seen the enemy soldiers dropping down the entire battalion in front must soon be put out of business. He wondered whether some of them might not have thrown themselves down as if severely wounded, just to escape that rain of missiles. It would have been human nature to try and avoid destruction; for surely all hope of succeeding in the stroke must have gone glimmering ere now.

Apparently some of the fleetest of the assailants must have succeeded in coming up, and were within striking distance; for here, there, and everywhere the eager Italians were hastily clambering out of their trenches, with bright bayonets ready for business, and a fierceness in their hearts.

Again did Sid and Bob venture to raise their heads to witness what was taking place. Some peculiar fascination impelled them, though they afterwards found cause to wonder how they dared do such a thing, being already fairly sated with every species of horror.

They could see the opposing soldiers meet and lunge fiercely at each other, all that was savage in their natures being on tap. Here two had closed, and were desperately clinched in a death grapple. How strange it was that in an emergency, when their weapons failed them, soldiers should unconsciously go back to such principles as the cave man depended on to overcome his ape-like foe.

But the battle was really over, Bob realized. The Austrians, at this point of the line at least, had been sorely handled, and with their lines broken could not possibly show further fight. Stragglers were retreating backward in batches of two and three, or even singly. Possibly some of these were the shrewd fellows who had saved their lives by falling on their faces as though wounded, allowing the storm to rattle harmlessly over their prostrate bodies. They evidently believed in that old and wise maxim to the effect that "he who fights and runs away, may live to fight another day." And surely hard pushed Austria would have good need of all her sons before the great war came to an end, with Russia still fighting in the East, and Italy keeping up this furious series of attacks at the South.

Soon the barrage would fall again, and the Austrian big guns commence to shell the trench line. Captain Antonio was figuring on his course. He believed there was a chance to get his charges safely away between these periods. Just as soon as he could detect a change in the firing he meant to make the attempt. Of course it meant a certain amount of risk; but then they would have to accept this, no matter what their plans might be.

Some prisoners were being brought in, though their number did not seem to be very large. Many had fallen where they stood rather than surrender. Needless to say these were the bravest of the brave, though Bob did not blame any man who knew when he had had enough of this terrible fighting, and was ready to give up.

Yes, now the fire was beginning to slacken. Apparently the observers away back on the hostile ridge had discovered that the victory was not for their side; and that all those valiant men had fallen for nothing. Some unknown method of signalling must have conveyed this disappointing news to them. Consequently, since it was no longer of any use to try and cut off the retreat of the victors, or

prevent any reinforcement from reaching them, their guns would soon turn back again to shelling the trenches.

He now managed to let the two young fellows know what he had in view. This was partly done by word of mouth, and gestures. Besides Bob may have already surmised that such a thing would be next in order, for he guessed that the captain wished to get them safely away from there as soon as he could find an opening.

Presently the long awaited chance came. Captain Antonio steeled himself for the undertaking; yet had he been going alone he would probably have started earlier, and cheerfully accepted chances that he did not wish his charges to incur.

They scrambled out of the trenches. The star shells were still flecking the sky and rendering things distinctly visible; but there was no fear that the passage of just three figures would be noted by the disappointed Austrian observers, and invoke any special fire in their direction.

They hurried along as best they could, though with many a stumble, for all manner of obstacles lay in their path. The face of the

rocky plateau was cut up in a remarkable manner through the work of those monster shells exploding as they struck the ground.

Keeping together, and unconsciously bending low, though for what reason none of them could have explained if asked, the trio hastened away. Every rod gained would spell more chance of safety for them. The near vicinity of the trench line was going to be a danger zone again just as soon as the fire burst out afresh; and it was the hope of Captain Antonio that they might cover half a mile of ground ere such a thing came to pass.

Once Sid rather clumsily tripped and fell flat. Bob instantly bent down, with his heart seemingly in his throat. Some shells had continued to be thrown back of the line, and there could be no telling just how far their bursting fragments might speed through space, to bring painful wounds to any one around.

Before he could even attempt to shout out and ask Sid if he had been hurt the other commenced to scramble to his knees. This action assured the anxious Bob that nothing really serious could have happened, and his chum had only stubbed his foot against some fragment of rock that lay unseen in his path.

Sid limped a little afterwards, but seemed able to get along all right, though Bob did insist on putting an arm through that of his comrade, and lending him some assistance. Nor did Sid scorn the proffered help, because it felt good to just *know* that he had such a faithful friend at his elbow.

Looking back they could now see that the bombardment of the trenches had commenced again. It even looked as though those obstinate Austrians did not know when they were whipped, and actually meant to make a second attempt to drive the enemy out of those rock-hewn redoubts. To Bob it seemed almost like murder, to drive human beings up against such a proposition as those bristling machine-guns spitting and popping and roaring with concentrated fury.

The danger was lessening for the three fugitives, and they could begin to entertain hopes of being allowed to reach their goal without further risks. This certainly afforded both Sid and Bob great satisfaction. They felt that they had come in contact with enough horrors. Even the Virginia army boy, with the blood of a long line of fighting ancestors coursing through his veins, was coming to the conclusion



that modern warfare, with its dreadful mechanical weapons of wholesale death, was fast killing every bit of romance that may once have hovered above the battlefields of old, with the fighting being face to face and calling for individual heroism.

They did not count themselves safe until considerable more space had been placed between themselves and the trenches, where again the shells were falling heavily.

Both of them were more or less "shaky" as Sid called it. No wonder, after passing through such a tempest that would have tried the nerves of a veteran, let alone young chaps who were enduring their baptism of fire under such thrilling conditions.

Somehow both of them secretly hoped that the Austrian commander might change his mind about setting his men such an impossible task for the second time that night. Surely it had been tried and found wanting; and to waste more thousands in the vain attempt smacked of mere cruelty.

Now they drew near the camp. The noise was no longer quite so deafening, though it would be some time before either Bob or Sid would get that clamor out of their tortured

ears. No doubt often in times to come they would fancy they could again hear its awful clang. It would be like a thousand mighty sledge-hammers beating on so many anvils, though it might be but the oncoming rush of a freight train passing in the night.

Captain Antonio was evidently a happy man. He had been very much concerned over the safety of his charges. Perhaps the fact that General Cadorna himself had bidden him see to it that they came to no harm may have weighed heavily on the little Italian officer's mind. How indeed could he face that idol of the army and report that he had failed in his duty?

By rights they should have gone at once to their tent and secured some sleep, of which they were in great need. It was impossible to do this, however, for some time at least, until a portion of the fever had left their veins. So Bob and his chum sat near one of the camp fires, and listened to the din that rocked the hills like the throes of a Vesuvius or an *Ætna* in eruption.

They could manage to talk after a fashion now, and thus exchanged opinions in connection with the recent experience. Of course

they could not have seen everything alike, and there were numerous incidents either one or the other brought up that would always be of intense interest.

Finally quite worn out, and exceedingly thankful because they had escaped without a scratch, so to speak, they concluded to crawl into the tent and try to get some needed rest.

It was midnight then, and the gun chorus was still in full swing, with the trenches the centre of a constant fall of bombs. Sid pitied the poor fellows doomed to remain at their posts and endure another terrible siege of this fire. Perhaps in due time they must once more meet a fresh attack from new troops, when the whole story as witnessed by the strangers from over the sea would be repeated.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## A CHALLENGE FROM THE AIR.

WAKE up, Sid!"

As the sleeper opened his eyes again he found that it was broad daylight, while the clear notes of a bugle sounded reveille close by. He sat up, and used his knuckles to help chase the figments of sleep from his burning eyes.

Then he looked strangely at his chum. Bob seemed to guess intuitively what was in his mind, for he immediately exclaimed:

"No, it wasn't a dreadful nightmare you had, old fellow. We were there on the spot, and went through it all. It was an actual fact, and not a rarebit dream."

"And we were in the midst of a real battle, weren't we?" exclaimed Sid, as though that fact appealed most to him just then.

"We certainly had that wonderful experience," affirmed Bob, "and ought to count our-

selves mighty lucky to come through it all unharmed."

Sid shivered as though some chilly air had struck him.

"I'll never forget last night, though I live to be a regular old Methuselah, and that's right, Bob. Those sights and those sounds are going to haunt me always. But what does this silence mean? Do you think the Austrians could have made a second crazy attack, and found themselves beaten back again?"

"I don't know for certain," the other told him, "but I should say that on sober second thought, and after consulting with those who tested the Italian trench line, the Austrian Duke in command up yonder changed his mind, and concluded to let things rest as they were. If a second assault came off I believe it would have awakened even one of the famous Seven Sleepers like you, Sid."

"Well, I'm going to get dressed for one thing," asserted the other, gaining his feet with considerable agility.

"I can read that mind of yours again," laughed Bob. "You're thinking now that the sooner you get seated before some breakfast

the better you'll be pleased. Am I right there, Sid?"

"You hit the bullseye plum centre," agreed Sid. "But can you blame me when last night I didn't have a single bite of supper; because, about that time, we were watching the bombardment that was so wonderful. And as to taking any of the soldiers' grub, neither of us would allow such a thing. So now I have two meals to look after. I hope they won't be too long about sounding the assembly."

"Do you know," continued Bob, reflectively, "that Captain Antonio told me most of those poor chaps who tried to get our trenches were from Honved regiments, he called them; which I think stands for Hungarians. They are a brave lot of fighters, if ever any such could be found."

"But tell me, what would Hungarians be doing away over in this part of the Austrian possessions?" asked Sid. "It seems to me their place should be in Galicia, holding back the hordes of Russians, and their Cossack raiders."

"I thought you'd say that," Bob quickly observed, "for it struck me the same way, and I mentioned it to our friend, the captain. He



told me a number of interesting facts last night. Among other things he said that the Hungarians and the natives of Lower Russia sprang from the same parent stock, and that consequently the Honved regiments were not apt to do their best against their kin. So the Austrian high command artfully shifts them across to tackle the Italians."

"Well, now, that is a smart game, all right," agreed Sid.

"That's only half of the story," continued the other. "You understand that this region known as Italia Irredenta is peopled mainly by descendants of the ancient Romans, and that their sympathies run toward their old country. So regiments recruited from here are exchanged for the Honveds. Right now they are facing the Russians along the Eastern line, since they have no particular love for the czar's people. It works both ways, you understand."

Talking after this fashion they hastened to get themselves ready to go forth. As Sid had already commenced to notice an inviting aroma in the air, that must have had to do with the camp breakfast, his appetite clamored so loud-

ly that he could hardly fasten his leggings, his hands were trembling so.

Fortunately they did not have very long to wait around after venturing forth. As Captain Antonio also came up and engaged them in conversation, he having been long astir, he was able to give them considerable interesting information.

"No, there was no second assault," he explained, "though the bombardment of the trenches continued until two in the morning. We suppose the enemy commander came to his senses later on, and concluded that it was useless to sacrifice more of his men. So we have consolidated our recent gains, and will sooner or later be able to make another thrust. That will give us more ground, and also fetch in thousands of prisoners. Many of those we capture say they are glad to be out of it; and if the entire Austrian army could poll a vote today I believe it would be overwhelmingly in favor of peace at any price."

"Then why on earth do they keep on fighting?" asked Sid. "Have they got so in the habit that they just can't help it?"

"Hardly that," he was told. "They are simply obeying orders, like all good soldiers."

“Just so,” added Bob, and then quoted from the famous “Charge of the Light Brigade,” where somebody’s blunder made a terrible sacrifice; “‘Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do, and die’—you remember it, Sid?”

“Sure I do,” said the other, “and the rest of it applies pretty well to what we saw and heard last night—‘cannon to the right of them, cannon to the left of them, cannon to the front of them, volleyed and thundered; theirs not to make reply, theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die.’ I’ll never hear that again, let me tell you, Bob, but I’ll have a revelation, and see the awful fight for the trenches over yonder.”

Shortly afterwards they were summoned to breakfast. It was simple enough but at the same time bountiful. Sid even had the privilege of trying to make up for the meal he had lost.

From time to time they would see the wounded being brought in from the front. It was no longer a novelty, though both of them felt their hearts thrill with sympathy to see the poor mangled chaps carried by. More than a few times they took especial pains to wave

their hands to a load passing. Nor did they thus salute in vain, for hands were raised in return, and men who must have been suffering severely even tried to smile cheerily, such is human nature at its best. And Bob was pleased to see more than one Austrian uniform among those thus being carried to the field hospital. It made him think better of his fellow beings to note this. It also served to blot out in some measure the savage scenes he had witnessed at close quarters on the preceding night, when men went back to primitive principles, and actually tore at one another's throats in their mad battle rage.

Well, both young fellows hoped they would not witness another such sight as that one had been. Of course the future was effectually screened from their vision, and neither could tell what strange incidents awaited them in other quarters thousand of miles removed, it might be, from those battle fields along the Isonzo—possibly even down in revolutionary Mexico.

“What shall we do today, Bob?” asked Sid, after he had finished his morning meal, and the two of them were roaming about the vast camp, again on the lookout for any odd sights.

"Rest up, for one thing," the other unhesitatingly replied, "for we certainly need it, after all we've gone through. Then I think we'd better make our arrangements with Captain Antonio to return to Rome, starting to-morrow."

Sid did not offer any objection.

"Between us, old fellow," he went on to say, with a queer smile, "I've had about all I can stand of this butchery business. It's going to give me many a bad hour for a long while to come, and I know it. Yes, I've had my fill of fighting; though I must say I was glad of the chance to be of help in taking care of some of those wounded soldiers. They were a brave, patient lot, and thanked us with their smiles even when they must have been suffering terribly."

"They'll suffer much more today," Bob asserted. "You see, a gunshot wound nearly always produces a deadening sensation at first, and it is later on that the pain comes. Why, in the heat of battle many a man has not known even that he had been struck until he found himself growing weak from loss of blood."

"Well, our friends the enemy got a sound

drubbing last night, Bob; and I don't think we can expect to hear anything more from him for some time. When the game moves along to a certain point it will be the turn of Cadorna to make one of his quick thrusts. Like as not he'll seize yet another fortified peak that has been like a thorn in his flesh."

"Wait, perhaps it's going to turn out entirely different from what you seem to think," Bob hastened to say, considerably to the surprise of his chum.

"Now whatever can you mean by that, Bob? And why are you looking up in such a queer way, as if you thought—I say, what's that aviator doing up yonder? It rather strikes me he's using an Austrian type of machine in the bargain. Do you suppose that the bright young Italian pilot we were trying to talk with yesterday could have patched up a machine he captured from the enemy? Can that be he sailing around in circles far up toward the clouds?"

"Not on your life it isn't, Sid. Look closer and you'll see that it's a small Austrian flag he's trailing after him."

"I see it now, Bob. But is he trying to take photographs of our positions below here? Per-



haps he's hunting out some of our latest positions, where we've got the heavy guns in hiding. Or it may be he expects to drop a few more bombs down on the camp here, to sort of take out some of the sting of their defeat last night."

"Well, I don't know just what he's after," replied the other, watching the circling airplane closely, and with increasing interest. "He certainly has a clear field to himself, since there isn't one Italian machine up, at present. He may be snapping off pictures right now, to give the Austrian commander fresh pointers. But from the way the fellow keeps circling around and around it looks to me mighty much like a dare, or a challenge."

"Do you mean he wants one of our pilots to accept the chance, and come up to have it out with him?" demanded Sid.

"Oh! well, you know they're a pretty scrappy bunch, those airmen," continued Bob. "When danger declines to come to them they often start out to hunt for it, just as the humor seizes them. That fellow has been fretting over the losses of the battle last night. He wants to win back some shred of glory for

his side, even if to do so he has to take his own life in his hand, and go forth."

Sid gazed upward.

"We haven't had a chance to return those glasses we borrowed," he suddenly exclaimed; "shall I step over to the tent and get the same?"

"Fine of you to remember them, Sid; so go, if you've a mind to," Bob told him; and inside of three minutes the other was back again, bearing the splendid binoculars with him.

As soon as they started to make good use of these they found that there could be no possible mistake concerning the character of the venturesome airplane pilot. It was an Austrian small flag that decorated the machine, as though the birdman might wish to show his colors and invite attack.

"He's a good one, all right!" declared the admiring Sid.

As he watched through his glasses, he saw that the pilot was actually making some derisive gestures, being at the time almost directly over the hangars of the aviation squad attached to this section of the Italian front.

"I wonder will any of the boys accept the

challenge?" Sid went on to say. "It would hardly be fair for half a dozen to start up, and outnumber him so heavily, though of course he could dart away, and get back over his own lines. It may be that is what he aims to do anyhow, and this is only a smart trick meant to draw some of our 'planes over a trap they've spread on a peak yonder."

"Those are things the air pilots have to look out for, you see, Sid. At times they may seem to be the most reckless of chaps; and then again they exercise great caution along with their daring. An aviator's profession is the top-notch of modern fighting. As the months pass along the various armies in the field are coming to depend more and more on their air service. They get charts of the country, and the movements of the enemy forces, as well as throw down tons upon tons of high explosives. These, if they reach the right spot, can do enormous damage to supply depots, Zeppelin sheds, airplane hangars, moving trains loaded with troops or ammunition, and all such things."

"Our own country is terribly behind the times along those lines, that's certain," Sid continued, dolefully. "Now, if later on we

should get into this big scrap let me tell you there's going to be a swift awakening, and in a year's time America will hardly know itself. For one thing I could tell you the names of two chaps of my acquaintance who will never be happy unless they are on the firing line."

"Yes, and there's my cousin, Jack Farragut Warren, who will be among the first to be bustling around looking for those miserable sneaking undersea boats. He wrote me his opinion of the submarines, and the men who man them; and really it wouldn't be just the thing to put in print."

"Look, Bob, his challenge has been accepted, it seems like, for there goes one of the Italian airmen up to give the Austrian battle. I wonder if it can be our young acquaintance."

"Just who it is, and no mistake," Bob assured him. "Something seemed to tell me he would be the one to mount. Don't you remember how his eyes flashed as he told how his chum had been deceived by a trick, and sent down to his death? He had a look on his face that told me as plain as words could have done he would seize on the very first opportunity to avenge that young Neapolitan's downfall.

And so he's going up now to wipe out the stain, or sacrifice his own life."

Sid heaved a long sigh.

"Well," he ventured to say, as he followed the mounting airplane and its daring pilot with eyes glued tight to his binoculars, "he's as good as they make them, so Captain Antonio told us when we asked about him. The chances are we're going to witness a battle royal among the clouds right now. One or the other, perhaps both of them, will come down faster than he ascended; and at such a height it's equal to sure death to fall."

So settling themselves to watch what came about the pair followed the actions of the two rival winged battle cruisers of the air, as they circled and shifted positions as if in hopes of obtaining the first advantage.

## CHAPTER XVII.

WELL WON, YOUNG ITALY!

FROM the beginning of the aerial combat it was plain to be seen that the clever Austrian birdman had met a foeman worthy of his steel. Not only was the young and agile Italian pilot capable in his profession, but he was also urged on by a desire to avenge the recent death of his mate, who had been sent down from a point half a mile high through what seemed to be a scurvy trick.

In nearly all cases these venturesome fellows who take their lives in their hands every time they go aloft seem to be possessed of a certain amount of singular chivalry. The very hazards of their chosen profession make them feel respect for those they meet as hostiles. Many a time has an Allied pilot taken his cap off as a token of sincere respect, after defeating an enemy who gave him a square fight. Doubtless this feeling is at least in part re-



turned by those on the other side of the struggle for supremacy in the air.

As there was little if any firing just about that time, those watching below were able to exchange remarks concerning the progress of the combat, as well as voice their various opinions regarding its probable outcome.

"They're a pair of dandies, mark me, Bob!" exclaimed the admiring Sid, after he had watched these remarkable evolutions, by means of which each airman strove to get the better position—"jockeying," Bob had heard the movement called, which word undoubtedly came from the race-track.

Bob had been trying to compare the different methods of the two men, and by this time had arrived at a decision in his own mind.

"All very true, Sid," he went on to say, confidently, "but I believe our friend is really the better man of the two. Notice how he swings through every movement as though his machine were a part of himself. He never once loses confidence in his ability to accomplish what he has set out to do."

"Then you think he'll come out ahead in the end, Bob?"

"Unless some accident happens which we

can't foresee, I certainly do," the other replied.

"Do you mean to his airplane?" demanded Sid.

"It may be that, because such things will come to pass, no matter how careful the pilot has been when looking his battleplane over. But I was thinking of something else when I spoke."

"You mean that the Austrian may be aiming to play a trick, don't you, Bob?"

"Just that," came the reply.

"In that case the very enthusiasm of our friend may spell his doom," remarked Sid, dejectedly; "for he is so wrapped up in his plan to get that pilot he isn't apt to notice just how close he may be drawing to the enemy lines; and a sudden burst of shrapnel and rifle shots might wind up the game. I say it would be a shame for such a thing to come about, when these two men are so evenly matched; they ought by all means be allowed to fight it out on those lines until one or the other gets the decision."

"Well, you know everything is said to be fair in war," Bob sagaciously remarked; "and these nimble air pilots are such a thorn in the

side of a maneuvering army that I reckon neither lets a chance to down one get by."

"Oh! look at that swoop, will you?" ejaculated Sid, with a gasp of admiration.

"That Austrian is certainly at the top of his profession," Bob went on to admit; "but there goes our friend right after him; and his plunge was just a shade more brilliant and daring than the other's. They are firing at each other too, as they keep on jockeying."

"Yes, I can catch the rattle of the machine-guns from time to time," admitted Sid. "It must be a pretty hard thing to manage an airplane, and at the same time manipulate one of those pepperboxes."

"There are usually two, you know, aboard a battle-plane, but this Austrian has chosen to take the chances alone. That was why the Italian disdained to have any advantage over him, and left his helper behind. It's a spirit of gallantry in the profession. He would have felt humiliated to shoot down an enemy when two to one."

"Do you know, Bob, I am getting to admire these air pilots more and more as I see them work, and hear such fine stories about their actions toward their enemies. Right now it

strikes me the air service is about the only romantic thing left in modern war. All the rest has become too mechanical. Men have been under fire for as much as five days at a stretch, killing hosts of the enemy, and yet never seeing a single one so far as their own vision is concerned. Miles away their shells explode, and wreck trenches, smash through munition parks, tear gaps in the lines of marching troops, and only the observer sees these things through his glass, directing the aiming and firing of the big guns. There, doesn't the Austrian plane seem to have a limp, if you could call it by such a name?"

"I thought so myself at first," replied Bob, instantly, "but I've come to the decision it may have been a clever little trick meant to deceive our young friend, and perhaps lure him on a little further. You can see there's no sign of any damage now."

"But what would he do such a thing for?" asked the puzzled Sid.

"Depend on it he has a good reason," his chum told him. "Haven't you often seen a mother partridge run across the country road, fluttering as if she had a broken wing, and attempting to coax you to give chase? Of

course she was only trying to lure you further away from the thicket where her little brood of young crouched and waited. And in nine times out of ten the game works all right. Well, this Austrian pilot may be trying to get the sporting blood of the Italian heated up by making out he's been winged, whenever he thinks the other shows signs of holding back."

"Bob, I do believe you're right, after all!" snapped Sid, angrily.

"The more I see of the fight up there the better I'm convinced that there's something crooked going to be sprung before long."

"And he's working his way further from our camp, that's certain, for, Bob, you remember they were almost directly above us when the game started. Now see how the battle rages almost a mile away; yes, and they're no longer at such a tremendous altitude either. That may mean something, it strikes me."

"It may mean everything," Bob asserted, grimly. "If you notice you'll see that they're getting pretty close to that high peak lying over yonder. Now, our forces don't occupy that mountaintop, I'm sure, and we haven't noticed firing come from it at any time. I wouldn't be afraid to wager, though, that the

Austrians, who are climbers equal to the Italians, the Tyrolese wing of their army at least, have worked their way up to the crown, and right now are lying there, hidden from view."

"With rapid-fire guns, of course you mean, because they could never in the wide world drag one of those great big howitzers up there?" Sid queried.

"Yes, and it may be one of those anti-aircraft guns in addition, which are used to fire straight upward at circling 'planes," Bob gravely announced.

"Oh! if only we could warn him in some way!" wailed Sid.

"Of course that is impossible," said Bob. "All we can do is to watch what happens, and hope the youngster's luck sticks by him."

"He's keeping on after his enemy all right, you notice, Bob?"

"Still the slippery Austrian seems able to dodge all his lead, some way or other, Sid, though it's a marvel to me how both of them can stand such hammering without their planes being struck in a vital part, or being wounded themselves."

"Do you suppose our friend suspects any sort of trap?" asked Sid.



"Perhaps he may," came the reply, "but by this time he's worked up to such a desperate pitch that he doesn't care much. He is bound to get that fellow if he has to follow him right over the camp of the enemy, and down close to the ground."

"We'll soon know about it, because there they go again; and this time it looks like they would bring up just above the lone peak," and Sid clapped his glasses once more to his eyes, as though not for worlds would he miss anything connected with the thrilling spectacle.

Just as he had said, the rival 'planes were now over the apparently deserted peak, which gave no sign of occupancy. Before a quarter of a minute had slipped past Sid was heard to give vent to a cry.

"There, you can see smoke burst out from among the rocks and stunted trees growing on the peak! They're there, Bob, as sure as you live! He's fallen to the mean trick of that treacherous Austrian pilot! Oh! I hope he manages to give them the slip all right, that's what I do! It was a shame to play such a game on a brave enemy! I'd like to see that Austrian chap get what he deserves for it!"

Plainly Sid was considerably worked up

over the lively fight that was being staged at such a high altitude, for the benefit of thousands of interested observers on both sides. His sympathies were naturally with the young Italian, though at the same time he was capable of admiring any evidence of skill or daring on the part of the other pilot.

Doubtless others who were watching through a host of glasses felt pretty much the same way about it, especially if they were on the Italian side. The venturesome flier could be seen to duck and dodge in a remarkably smart fashion, as though he might have some object in view, though neither Bob nor Sid seemed to be able to guess just then what it could be.

Judging from the amount of smoke noticed over the crest of the elevation those in hiding there were working their guns for all they were worth. Of course the sound of firing came but faintly to the ears of the two chums, for the distance was considerable. Besides, what wind chanced to be stirring was against them.

"He's gone!" almost shrieked Sid, suddenly, as the Italian machine was seen to make a suspicious dip; and then as it instantly righted again, thanks to the wonderful ability of its

pilot, he hastened to add triumphantly: "No, he's all right yet, thank goodness! Oh! why doesn't he spin away from that hot box while he has the chance?"

Bob did not trouble to make any reply. In fact just then he began to catch some sort of inspiration concerning the meaning of the expert Italian birdman's eccentric gyrations. He was willing to accept further risks in the hope of turning the tables on his enemy.

Yes, Bob could see that in swooping downward he actually passed directly between the Austrian machine and the concealed battery on the peak. Thus if the gunners continued firing some of their missiles stood a chance of passing the one they were intended for, and striking the second plane; and it was this very game the adroit and reckless Italian was playing.

Bob, after grasping this idea, fairly held his breath with suspense and awe. Was it possible to bring about such a wonderful climax to the duel in the air? Would it not be an act of retributive justice if the other machine were crippled in place of the one thus lured to the zone of fire? Bob found himself hoping fer-

vently that such would be the case, though it seemed almost too good to happen.

There followed a brief period of further dodging on the part of the endangered one. He made these flights with such astonishing rapidity that half the time Sid actually believed the end had come, and with every downward swoop his heart seemed to stop beating for that second or two.

Then something happened!

Apparently the Italian birdman had finally succeeded in gaining just the position for which he was aiming. The hot fire of the battery would pass him by, and reach the hostile plane hovering above, with the other aviator using his own machine-gun as he found an opportunity.

Sid gave a whoop.

"Why, look at the Austrian turning turtle, will you? He's a goner! Bob, I tell you it's all up with him. Whatever happened, do you know?"

"His own friends have shot him down!" jerked out Bob. "It was all cleverly fixed by our friend."

"A case of the biter bitten, eh?" continued

Sid, panting with excitement as he watched the falling battleplane.

The pilot was making most desperate efforts to right his machine, and at one time seemed almost on the point of doing so. But a current of air may have struck him just at the critical instant, for he lost his balance again, and this time shot down like a plummet.

The Italian aviator, taking advantage of a brief breathing spell, while the battery was still, could be seen making off at top speed, as though he hoped to be out of range before they could start again.

Every glass was of course following the descent of the stricken plane. There could be no question concerning the fate of the occupant, for it would crash heavily upon the side of the mountain, rocky and bleak, so that there was not one chance in a thousand of the wretched pilot's survival.

Somehow neither of the young Americans seemed to feel any great amount of sympathy for the victim of the duel in the air. It was true that he had exhibited great cleverness in manipulating his machine; but his treachery left a bad taste in the mouths of the lads. It did not seem to be such clean fighting as they

had been led to believe birdmen usually put up.

They lost sight of the plunging plane with its helpless occupant. It landed somewhere halfway down the rocky slope, and vanished from view. From the camp of the Italians went up a mighty shout. So the Israelites must have cheered when David slew the giant Goliath with a stone from his primitive sling.

Sid turned and reached for the hand of his chum, as though he felt it incumbent on him to exchange congratulations with some one over the clever work of the young Italian air pilot.

"He certainly deserves to be given a medal for that smart job," Sid went on to say fervently; "and that other chap—well, it isn't just the right thing to speak evil of the dead; and I reckon he's met his fate, after that terrible tumble."

"It was a wonderful sight," observed Bob, "and all the better because it turned out a victory for our side. But I must say I'm not hankering after an aviator's profession, although I can understand what a dreadful fascination it must have for those who follow it, once they get the hang of the ropes."



## CHAPTER XVIII.

## STOPPED ON THE ROAD.

**A**NOTHER night came and found the two chums anxiously awaiting the hour when they could make a start toward the rear. They felt they had experienced enough of battle and bivouac for the time being, and would welcome a few of the comforts of civilized life again.

They were also positive they could never forget the wonderful things they had seen while on the Isonzo front with the legions of Cadorna. So too the perils that had hovered over their own heads from time to time would always be fresh in their memories.

"I hope there isn't going to be another attack on either side while we're hanging out here," Sid said, between yawns, as the hour grew late, and they talked of seeking the blankets placed at their disposal inside the tent.

"Ditto!" echoed Bob promptly, "because I'm tired of seeing men suffering from all sorts

of terrible wounds, sick of watching them bringing in the poor chaps who will never fight again."

"Of course all that field hospital business was mighty interesting to me," acknowledged the other, meditatively; "but I own up it was like rushing the mourners. You see, I haven't ever had any great experience, and some of those hurts were simply *awful*. Yes, I'm willing to call it quits, and start back home again. Old America, peaceful America will look pretty fine to us, Bob; almost the only country worth mentioning not bristling with guns, and with millions of men in uniform marching and maneuvering, like we saw them everywhere in England."

"Well, it may reach us in time," remarked Bob, soberly.

"Oh! come, do you really mean that we'll get mixed up in all this terrible row, and have to raise an army like Great Britain did?" asked Sid, incredulously.

"That's just what I do mean," his chum told him, gravely. "The sinking of the *Lusitania* is warning enough that if the war is prolonged another eighteen months we will be in it up to the neck. Uncle Sam's army boys will

have to take part of the burden on their shoulders. But I'm looking for trouble even before that."

"Oh! you mean down in Mexico I reckon now, Bob?"

"Yes, that man Villa will force us to intervene there, I'm sure, Sid. He's managing things to fix it that way. Some say he is handling German gold. I don't know anything about that, though it seems possible. They are up to all sorts of cunning devices, and America is about as full of German spies as England ever could have been just after war broke out."

"Then we may get back home again just in time to be sent down to the Mexican border, in search of trouble?" Sid suggested.

"It wouldn't surprise me if we were," the other nodded.

"That would be some change for us, to be sure," chuckled Sid, as he figuratively contemplated the move. "Instead of snowcapped mountains, and raw winds, we'd find ourselves adrift on burning deserts, and suffering from thirst half the time."

"The greatest difference would show in the kind of fighting we'd run across," Bob continued. "Instead of modern up-to-date howit-

zers, and tractors hauling them, we'd find the army mule as of old, some gasolene trucks for freighting purposes, mounted men acting as cavalry, machine-guns, and light batteries. It would be guerilla warfare like that employed by the Yaqui Indians when hunted in their native mountain fastnesses by Mexican regulars. So things would be turned right around for us, Sid."

Soon afterwards they sought their cots, being very tired after a long day. Besides, it must be remembered that they had passed through a most thrilling experience on the preceding night, and lost much sleep in the bargain.

There came no alarm to disturb them, for which both felt extremely thankful. They awakened when the clear notes of the bugle sounded the reveille. As this day was to mark their departure from the fighting front of course they began to notice the weather one of the first things.

"I don't altogether like the signs up there," Bob remarked, after he had made a survey at the particular request of his chum, who seemed to place considerable dependence on Bob's ability to play the part of weather prophet.

"Do you mean it looks as if we may have a storm?" asked the other.

"The indications point that way, Sid, though you mustn't lay too much stress on what I say, because I'm not at home here in this mountainous country. You know weather signs vary according to geographical location. Where we live an east wind is always believed to mean three days' rain; but down on the Florida peninsula it is the finest breeze of the winter, as it comes direct off the Gulf Stream."

"Well, I hope that the storm gives us the go-by then," Sid remarked, drily; "because I'm not hankering after striking one among the mountain passes. I've heard they are sometimes regular tearers when they stir things up. But I say, Bob, such a little chance isn't going to keep us from making a start, I hope?"

"Well, hardly, Sid. It would have to be a pretty heavy storm that could hold a fellow of your build back, once you'd made up your mind to go. But of course we'll have to be guided mostly by what our conductor says. Captain Antonio is better posted on such things around this region than either of us could be."

Captain Antonio, coming up just then, had

the question put to him. He saw that his charges were very anxious to get started back again in the direction of Rome. He knew they had some very important business to transact with the Minister of the Navy, and would then be wanting to take the first steamer bound for New York, although in so doing they must accept the risks of the submarine embargo.

He told them he knew of nothing to interfere with their plans, if they were ready to take things as they found them.

“We may have to accept horses, and make use of that primitive method of passage, unless we choose to wait for tomorrow,” he went on to explain; “because I am told that the immense supply of badly needed munitions has choked the only railway line reaching us; and owing to this fact all trains today are ordered to come this way. Even the many wounded will have to be cared for in temporary hospitals until they can be started back home tomorrow, if all is well.”

“Why, the horses will be fine!” immediately declared Sid. “Both of us are accustomed to mounts, for we live in Virginia, where hunting is done on horseback. How about that, Bob, hadn’t we better make an early start so as



to get well along our way in case that old storm of yours chases after us?"

"I want you to understand that I haven't any sort of claim on a storm, so please stop calling it mine," the other protested; "but about the horse part of it, nothing could please me better; only of course we can't expect to have such horses as we ride at home."

Breakfast being dispatched they made ready to start. On the whole little fault could be found with their mounts. The Italians are mostly good horsemen, and have a record for dashing feats on the part of their cavalry; and as it was known that the two young Americans were in high favor at Headquarters, particular care had been exercised so as to secure them chargers worth having.

They left the great camp with more or less concern, and answered the many friendly gestures from officers and enlisted men with warm salutes. The picture of that modern encampment amidst the Alpine steeps would long remain an inspiring memory with both young fellows, when far away, and gazing upon other scenes entirely different in every way.

An hour later they were galloping along the rocky road, now ascending, and again heading

down-grade. They could occasionally catch glimpses of the railroad, and even saw a long train, heavily laden with the munitions so badly needed along the whole Isonzo front, such had been the tremendous wastage, with all that severe fighting taking place.

But as was natural Sid's thoughts were more taken up in remembering the thousands of wounded fellows who would have to remain in temporary shelters, owing to the glut of munition trains on the single-track road. Twenty-four hours would mean a matter of life and death with many of the most badly injured cases; but it could not be helped, and doubtless those in high command suffered as well as the wounded did.

They came upon many interesting sights on the way. Soldiers were met marching along the road, and always with their faces grimly set toward distant Gorizia, the present goal of their hopes. After that it would be Trieste; and eventually, who knew but what many even hoped to see Vienna in the Italian army's hands before the end came. It would be the height of their ambition to enter the proud capital of the nation through which so much of their humiliation of the past had come.

Several times they were overtaken by power trucks laden with some of the wounded. This was when they were giving their horses a brief resting spell, or watering them at a wayside spring.

One thing the observing Sid noticed with considerable satisfaction.

"You might think they'd make use of these ambulances just to send wounded officers back in," he said to Bob, "but it isn't so. Most of the occupants are soldiers of the line, I've noticed."

"Just so," the other added, with a ring of pleasure in his voice; "and now we can understand why General Cadorna is so beloved by his army. They worship him, I'm told. You see he will stand for no favorites. The life of a common soldier at such times as this is as precious as that of a colonel of the line. The Italian army is most democratic, and the officers, like the French, share hardships with their men. You noticed that our food while plentiful did not consist of delicacies. Time was when officers fared on the choice things of the land, while the soldier had to do his fighting on coarse stuff, and hunt up part of that himself."

"It amuses me to see how some of these soldiers stare at us when we happen to meet a column coming along," Sid continued.

"Oh! they wonder who and what we are, that's all," explained Bob. "Captain Antonio says there have been a lot of Austrian spies at work over here, and reports of their doings have been grossly exaggerated; so that orders have been given to all detachments to keep a sharp eye out for any suspicious characters. But so far a word from our guardian angel, or at most the showing of that document, has been enough to pass us on."

Another hour and they felt they had made very good progress. It was possible for them to catch the muttering of heavy firing in the distance from time to time. The sound was strangely like thunder, and once Sid actually believed the storm Bob had predicted was about to swoop down upon them.

It was at this time the captain discovered something annoying.

"I am growing careless, it seems, young signors," he told them, with a grimace, and a suggestive shrug. "In truth, I have left my famous drinking cup, which has a history, you

will remember, back at that spring we drank at ten minutes ago."

"I will ride back and get it for you, Captain!" exclaimed Sid, readily.

"Not so, I beg of you, my friend; it would humiliate me, I assure you. Mine was the fault and I alone should pay for my carelessness. Do you either move along slowly, or if it please you wait for me under some tree by the roadside. I will rejoin you shortly."

With that he wheeled his horse and started back along the road.

"Which shall we do, Bob?" asked Sid.

"Oh! it doesn't matter much, although of course we'd be making more time by jogging along. He can soon overtake us again, and it might be a few miles gained by our keeping on the move."

This they proceeded to do, making no attempt at speed. Shortly afterwards they saw a cloud of dust rising ahead of them; for the road in this section had not been oiled or watered, as there was no danger of the enemy learning of the disposition of moving bodies of troops.

"Something coming this way," announced Sid. "It may be a detachment of infantry

headed for the front, or perhaps some empty ambulance going back for another load."

"All right, we'll give them their share, and more, of the trail," laughed Bob. "In some places it might be a risky thing for two vehicles to pass, with a precipice yawning close by. Just here we are at a lower level, in fact almost in a valley. There, now you can see that it's a company of soldiers coming on. The want of room aboard the trains compels them to do a lot of tramping, it seems."

As they drew nearer the detachment they discovered that they had become the objects of more or less excited comment among several officers who were with the fresh troops, one of them a lieutenant, Bob quickly saw.

"I hope now they don't mean to give us any trouble," Sid was saying, showing that he had also noticed this significant fact.

"We'll try to make them understand we're Americans, if that scowling lieutenant can only catch on to what we say," Bob continued. "Here, let's pull up, and wait for them to come on; we can occupy this space alongside the road. And besides if he has covered the ground as rapidly as I think it's almost time for Captain Antonio to overtake us."



As the soldiers arrived opposite to them Bob and Sid smiled, and made friendly gestures. To their surprise and chagrin the officer in charge gave gruff orders, and almost immediately a dozen men surrounded the horsemen. After that the lieutenant spoke something rapidly, but as he used the Italian language, which was almost unknown to the two chums, of course they could only guess at what he was saying.

"We are Americans," said Bob, pointing first to his companion and then himself. "We have been received by General Cadorna and the King, and are on our way to Italy. Our companion, Captain Antonio, has gone back a little distance to recover a cup he valued, and which he left at a spring. He will overtake us at any minute and show you our papers."

He looked to see how this was taken. The lieutenant apparently did not speak or understand English. He had made up his mind that there was something decidedly suspicious about these two young fellows. What business could they have upon the military highway in an enemy country? He stared at them, talked with a subordinate, frowned again savagely as if wishing to impress the pair with a sense

of his own vast importance; and then gave some orders.

Two of the men immediately grasped the bridles near the bits. They too, taking their cue from the manner of their commander, frowned angrily. Sid cast a look of concern in the direction of his chum.

“Why, would you believe it, Bob!” he exclaimed, as though half stunned, and not knowing whether to laugh at the absurdity of the thing, or show signs of anger, “the sillies suspect us of being Austrian spies!

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